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REGIONAL COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

Waikato Regional Spatial Inventory

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Executive summary

This Waikato Regional Spatial Inventory (RSS Inventory) has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council (WRC) as the evidence base for the development of a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

This RSS Inventory establishes what an RSS is, what matters it may include, and how it fits into the statutory context of New Zealand. It identifies that the purpose of an RSS is to steward the use of space in a way that is consistent with regional priorities, economic and social strategies, and national strategic goals, shaping positive economic, social, cultural and ecological outcomes through place making. The government's recent announcements on resource management reform indicate that regional spatial plans should be focused on identifying sufficient future urban development areas, development areas that are being prioritised for public investment, and existing and planned infrastructure corridors and strategic sites.

Guided by this understanding of spatial planning, the RSS Inventory provides a snapshot of the information currently held by WRC, other local authorities in the Waikato region, and other stakeholders that may be useful or relevant in developing an RSS. This includes highlighting the overall context of the Waikato region and the key issues and opportunities identified by policy and community, and also collating existing work and information regarding economy, infrastructure, land-use and environment (covering terrestrial, marine and coastal). This includes analysis of demographic and economic information sources, local authority policy documents and central government agency strategic direction.

In summary, the Waikato region, located in the central North Island of New Zealand, is known for its diverse economy founded on primary production and significant geographical features. It is the fourth largest region in New Zealand, covering 25,000 square kilometres, and is strategically located within the golden diamond between two major economies in Auckland and the Bay of Plenty. The region has over 10% of NZ's population and comprises approximately 9% of New Zealand's total GDP. Hamilton, the largest city and key economic hub, is the country's fastest growing city by population and the mighty Waikato is the second-fasted growing region. There are 11 districts in the Waikato region, 12 local authorities and 40+ iwi and 180+ hapu.

The region is home to New Zealand's longest river, largest lake, 70% of geothermal systems, a wetland of international importance, a volcanic plateau, 1200km of coastline and the Hauraki Gulf. The region also has a major hospital and university, an airport soon to once again service international flights, two inland ports and a number of nationally recognised tourist destinations. The region is a powerhouse of primary production, particularly in dairy farming, producing more than 25% of New Zealand's milk supply.

Key opportunities and challenges identified across the Waikato span political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental domains, with key issues relating to resilience and climate change, infrastructure capacity, economic development and urban growth, social inequity and declining state of the environment.

The RSS Inventory analyses this information alongside relevant spatial data accessed by WRC under six regional themes, developed based on the key issues for the region and an understanding of what an RSS could address:

- Development and growth
- Infrastructure
- Natural environment
- Resilience (climate change and natural hazards)
- Community connections
- Culture and heritage.

Development and growth

Information to support development and growth across the region is largely based on local growth strategies and town concept plans, housing and business development capacity assessments, population projections, and spatial information on constraints to development, such as water allocation, infrastructure capacity, and soil constraints. The RSS Inventory sets out identified future growth areas and areas that may need to be avoided for development and urban growth. It also identifies key rural and agricultural areas across the region that may not be suitable for urban development, showing the relationship and tension between enabling growth and protecting productive land uses.

Infrastructure

Linked to the development and growth theme, a key regional issue is the provision and maintenance of supporting infrastructure, including water, transport, energy, social, communications and other infrastructure such as flood management, mines and aquaculture. Available infrastructure information is at widely varying levels of detail across the region. There is a lack of comprehensive infrastructure planning, reporting and analysis at a whole-of-region level, although there is good information available at a project, district and sub-regional level in some cases. The regional picture on strategic infrastructure, however, is improving, through an inter-regional infrastructure development plan being developed by the Upper North Island Strategic Alliance, and the current work of the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission.

Natural environment

The region is experiencing declining natural capital, including indigenous biodiversity and essential ecosystem services. Information gathered for the natural environment theme is based on areas that are already or should be protected, restored or enhanced in the context of growth and development. WRC holds a significant amount of regional spatial information relating to the natural environment, including rivers, lakes, wetlands, coastal marine area, biodiversity and vegetation and geothermal systems.

Resilience

Climate in the Waikato region is changing, and so are the risks the region may face as a result, with the frequency, severity and impact of natural hazards increasing. Different parts of the region are more susceptible to different natural hazards, such as drought, river flooding, coastal inundation, erosion, landslides, wildfire and earthquakes. These climate and natural hazard risks have serious implications for people and assets and highlight the need for continued investment in protective infrastructure, such as for flood management and drainage. There is a significant amount of climate and natural hazard information across the region, and WRC is currently undertaking modelling for a range of natural hazards that will provide more accurate and detailed coverage than the current spatial information available.

Community connections

The social structures and demographic makeup of the Waikato region are changing. For example, the population is generally ageing and there are growing numbers of young Māori and Pasifika people. There is a need to better understand communities to ensure people have access and are connected to opportunities for education, employment, recreation, health and other services. This theme collates information to better understand the places that connect people across the region and how people move between these places. Spatial information gathered spans transport infrastructure, including cycling and walking paths and trails, and regional public transport routes, tourism, community facilities, and key employment areas.

Culture and heritage

Information on culture and heritage shows that councils have iwi obligations relating to the entire region and that Māori culture is important across the whole region. It highlights a need to consider culture and heritage as an underlying basis for an RSS. Opportunities exist through RSS development to enhance partnerships with iwi and protect cultural heritage sites and sites of significance to Māori. This inventory identifies the key issues across iwi management plans in the region but it is understood

that it is only through direct, active engagement with tangata whenua that the context of this information can be confirmed and given detail.

The themes analysis highlighted a range of gaps in the information that an RSS would need in order to answer key regional questions and address key regional issues. Some of these gaps are already being filled by existing internal and external work programmes, covering population, housing, infrastructure, freshwater and hazards. Where gaps are not being filled, this RSS inventory prioritises gaps based on four criteria: importance, ease of sourcing, timing and cost. The overall priority ranking of gaps led to the formation of recommendations for the next phase of RSS development, both in terms of further information gathering, data management, and key findings to take forward into developing an RSS framework.

In terms of further information gathering, recommendations of highest priority primarily relate to the development and growth and infrastructure themes. This is reflective of the most significant data gaps and their relative importance in answering key regional questions and fulfilling the purpose of a spatial strategy. Particularly, additional information is required on existing infrastructure capacity, life cycle, and circle of influence to better understand where communities' needs are not being met, where investment is required, and whether infrastructure will cope with additional growth. Some of this kind of information is likely to be available at a local level.

Other "quick win" recommendations include backfilling some information gaps and overlaying layers with demographic and economic information, such as for social deprivation data, constraints on growth, rural land use change, water allocation, biosecurity areas and existing restoration efforts. It is also recommended to engage with iwi on cultural and heritage sites information to determine the best approach for its use in an RSS.

This inventory also provides recommendations for data management going forward, acknowledging that it will quickly become outdated as local authorities and central government agencies continue working through a period of significant change and new information comes to light. In order for the inventory to be useful going forward in the next phase of RSS development it is vital for the information to be kept up to date.

The RSS inventory aims to establish and ensure integration between various, mutual objectives for strategic stakeholders in the Waikato region and provide a platform for a cogent response to regional growth and infrastructure and future investment in this. An RSS needs to bring partners together, from local government, central government, iwi, community and other stakeholders, to see beyond territorial and administrative boundaries and work together to manage collective issues and seek joint opportunities for development and growth, infrastructure and the natural environment, whilst enhancing regional resilience, community connections and culture and heritage.

This inventory establishes an evidence base for this work to occur. While this report is a snapshot in time, it points to many enduring and ongoing pieces of work that can be referred back to in developing an RSS for the Waikato region. The key output of this inventory is the spatial platform that will need to be responsive to new and changing information over the course of the strategy development and beyond.

The next step in preparing an RSS for the Waikato region is to develop a framework that sets out how partners will work together to prepare an RSS, covering timing and resourcing and a collective vision for the region.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of report

This Waikato Regional Spatial Inventory (RSS Inventory) has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council as the evidence base for the development of a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

The region currently lacks a comprehensive and integrated strategic spatial strategy and plan to guide future land use and resource management. Waikato Regional Council (WRC) is well positioned to support the preparedness of an RSS given its regionwide mandate across a wide range of work activities and spatial planning activities. WRC has made provision to foster and facilitate the development of an RSS for the first four years of the 2024-2034 long-term plan (LTP) and this has the support of the Mayoral Forum and submitters on the WRC LTP.

This RSS Inventory is the first project towards establishing an RSS for the Waikato. The inventory will contribute to the strategic and technical preparedness for an RSS. The RSS Inventory provides a snapshot of the information currently held by WRC, other local authorities in the Waikato region, and other stakeholders that may be useful or relevant in the development of an RSS. This includes identifying and collating existing work and information regarding economy, infrastructure, land-use and environment (covering terrestrial, marine and coastal) to establish and ensure integration between various, mutual objectives and to provide a platform for a cogent response to regional growth and infrastructure. Given the region's existing spatial information and data is fragmented and siloed, there are gaps and inconsistencies in the data that are analysed and prioritised for recommendations.

A key output of the RSS Inventory is a regional profile that spatially presents the current state of the region through a set of dashboards on a spatial platform. This is summarised and analysed in this report and key messages are presented in supporting infographics. This is not yet publicly available and so the use of the spatial platform should be considered through the next phase of RSS development.

1.2 Format of the report

The report is divided into eight sections:

1. Introduction (this section)
2. Literature review
3. Statutory context
4. Waikato region context
5. Regional themes
6. Data inventory / stocktake
7. Recommendations for next phase of the RSS
8. Conclusion.

Section 1 of this report provides a high-level overview of the RSS project and its background, the purpose of the RSS Inventory and the process that was undertaken to prepare it.

Sections 2 and 3 provide context on strategic and spatial planning and how an RSS has been defined for this project, taking into account local and international examples of spatial plans and strategies and the legislative framework it exists within.

Section 4 provides context on the demographic and economic state of the Waikato region and the relevant priorities and work being done by the local authorities and other key stakeholders in the region.

Section 5 sets out the identified themes for the RSS Inventory that were developed based on a desktop study and the key issues and opportunities associated with each theme. It also identifies key questions based on those themes that an RSS for the Waikato region should aim to answer or provide guidance on.

Section 6 provides an analysis of the data and spatial information collated for the RSS Inventory and the gaps in that information, which are prioritised to guide recommendations for future work.

Sections 7 and 8 provide conclusions and proposes recommendations based on the findings of the RSS Inventory for future work in developing an RSS for the Waikato region. These recommendations primarily relate to further work that needs commissioning in order to answer the key regional questions that this RSS Inventory sets out.

1.3 Methodology

This inventory was developed by WRC staff by independently researching relevant literature, statistics, and GIS databases to gather and collate information that may be relevant to an RSS for the Waikato region. An internal group was formed to share and capture ideas, data and information from across the organisation for the inventory.

The key steps involved in the preparation of this inventory were as follows:

1. Literature review to establish what is an RSS and what matters it may include.
2. A stocktake of existing spatial information, plans, strategies and information regarding the Waikato region's economy, infrastructure, land-use and environment (covering terrestrial, marine and coastal).
3. Assessment of the current state of the information identified in the stocktake, identification of data and information gaps (including spatially), highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.
4. Prioritisation of the identified gaps using quantitative and qualitative criteria.
5. Begin to assess the inventory findings against identified key questions to inform recommendations for the next phase of developing an RSS for the Waikato region.

The second key step involved an analysis of the plans and strategies of local authorities in the region, as well as relevant legislation and national direction that form the underlying operating environment. A PESTLE scan was undertaken to understand the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental opportunities, issues and challenges being faced across the region at both a local and regional level. This step also involved a review of existing demographic and economic information that would underlie the spatial analysis.

From this, a group of themes and key regional questions that would support the development of an RSS were posed that guided the collation of spatial information and data. This GIS stocktake was an internal exercise and predominantly consisted of existing WRC data but external public spatial datasets were drawn on where relevant. Some discussions with external stakeholders were had to determine availability of additional relevant information. The collected spatial information is held in a technical portal that accompanies this report. A number of infographics at a regional level were developed to summarise the information gathered under each theme. These are also included in this report.

2 What is a Regional Spatial Strategy?

The terms 'spatial plan' and 'spatial strategy' tend to be used interchangeably across literature, although spatial plan is more commonly used. This inventory uses the term 'Regional Spatial Strategy' or 'RSS', as is used in the WRC LTP 2024-2034.

There are many definitions for spatial planning, and it is practiced in a range of ways corresponding to the particular local context, issues, values and desired outcomes of the place and its people. In a broad sense, spatial planning is an instrument used to manage sustainable development of a town, city, region or country. It is about shaping positive economic, social, cultural and ecological outcomes through 'place making'. Spatial planning processes are usually collaborative between government (central or local depending on scale) and the community.

Appendix 1 sets out a literature review on spatial planning that informed the development of this inventory, including a summary of a previous WRC report on spatial planning, the repealed Spatial Planning Act 2023, and local and international examples of spatial plans and strategies.

2.1 Key takeaways from literature review of spatial plans and strategies

The literature review of spatial plans and strategies (included in Appendix 1) provides an understanding of what an RSS might look like, contain, and aim to achieve. The key takeaways of this review are:

- Spatial plans/strategies are about how people (present and future) want to live, work and play in a place and how to provide for this whilst supporting the local economy, adapting to climate change and protecting the natural environment.
- Spatial plans/strategies tend to be focused on urban growth and development in the context of social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing.
- Spatial plans/strategies provide the ability to coordinate and align land use and infrastructure planning and provision.
- Spatial plans/strategies provide a degree of certainty to parties including central and local government agencies and infrastructure providers for investment decisions.
- Population information, data and projections tend to underpin all spatial plan/strategy themes and decisions.
- A spatial plan helps local councils and partner organisations prioritise what's important for their area and detail actions to meet community goals. A spatial plan informs but does not replace Regional/District Plans or Long-Term Plans.
- Spatial plans/strategies outline areas where partners need to collaborate.

From these key takeaways, this RSS Inventory identifies that the purpose of an RSS is to steward the use of space in a way that is consistent with regional priorities, economic and social strategies, and national strategic goals.

Additionally, the government's recent announcements on resource management reform indicate that regional spatial plans should be focused on identifying sufficient future urban development areas, development areas that are being prioritised for public investment and existing and planned infrastructure corridors and strategic sites.[1]

[1] New Zealand Government 2025. New planning laws to end the culture of 'no'. Beehive press release 24 March 2025. https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-planning-laws-end-culture-%E2%80%98no%E2%80%99

3 Statutory context

The below diagram illustrates the current statutory context that an RSS would fit within, noting that there is not specific legislation for spatial plans or strategy at this time. Appendix 2 further explains the hierarchy of legislation and strategic and planning documents.

It should be noted that the Government has announced its intentions for resource management reform, including the incorporation of regional spatial planning into legislation, with new legislation expected to be released in late 2025.[2] This will significantly change the statutory context within which an RSS for the Waikato region will be developed.

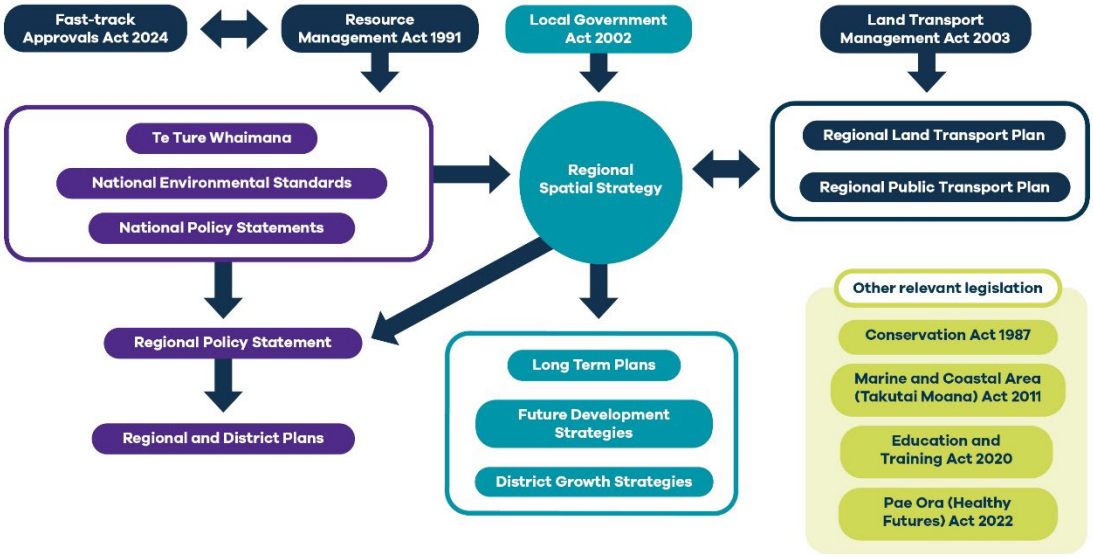


Figure 1: Current legislative context for spatial planning in the Waikato region.

4 Waikato region context

The Waikato region is the fourth largest region in New Zealand, covering most of the central North Island. It covers 25,000 square kilometres (2.5 million ha) stretching from the Coromandel Peninsula in the north, to Mount Ruapehu in the south. The region's coastal and marine environment includes the west coast from Mokau in the south to Port Waikato in the north, and on the east coast, the Firth of Thames and the Coromandel Peninsula, approximately 1200km of coastline. From the high tide mark out to 12 nautical miles offshore, it covers over 10,000 square kilometres.

Waikato is centrally located in the upper North Island, between the Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Manawatu-Wanganui and Taranaki regions. The region has 11 districts, including one city:

- Hamilton City
- Waikato District
- Waipā District
- Matamata-Piako District
- Thames-Coromandel District
- Hauraki District
- South Waikato District

[2] New Zealand Government 2025. New planning laws to end the culture of 'no'. Beehive press release 24 March 2025. https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-planning-laws-end-culture-%E2%80%98no%E2%80%99

- Ōtorohanga District
- Waitomo District
- Rotorua-Lakes District[3]
- Taupō District.[4]

The Waikato region also has over 40 iwi and more than 180 hapū with interests in the region. The principal iwi groups are Waikato, Maniapoto, Raukawa, Hauraki, Te Arawa and Tūwharetoa. There are 134 mapped marae across the region.

The Waikato region is growing at a faster rate than the national average; the region's population increased by 8.9% between 2018 and 2023.[5] This growth is primarily concentrated in and around Hamilton as opposed to the smaller districts that are experiencing lower growth rates.

The region's natural environment is nationally significant, with significant waterbodies Lake Taupō and the Waikato River as the country's largest lake and longest river, respectively, 70% of the country's geothermal systems, three RAMSAR wetlands including Whangamarino wetland which is of international importance, a volcanic plateau, and the Hauraki Gulf.

Waikato's central location in the upper North Island means the region has significant inter-regional links particularly in terms of infrastructure. State Highway 1 is a nationally significant transport corridor and connects Auckland to Manawatū-Whanganui through six of Waikato's districts. Road and rail freight corridors in the region facilitate flow of goods and vehicles across regions, particularly between the ports of Auckland and Tauranga. Water from the Waikato River supplies both Waikato and Auckland.

Almost a quarter of New Zealand's hydroelectricity comes from two major power schemes in the Waikato region[6] and the Huntly generation site plays a crucial role in the country's energy security. Further, 90%[7] of the primary geothermal energy extracted in New Zealand is from the Waikato region.

Waikato is part of the Te Manawa Taki (Midland) health region that combines the five District Health Board areas across the middle of the North Island. There are five public hospitals in the region, including Waikato Hospital in Hamilton which is a major hospital and provides tertiary services for the Midland region.

The Waikato region spans four education regions - Auckland (Pōkeno and Tuakau), Waikato, Bay of Plenty Waiariki (Taupō and Rotorua), and Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatū (Mōkau). There are 286 education organisations in the Waikato region,[8] not including early childhood education for which there are more than 490 options across the region.[9] The University of Waikato is rated in the top 1.1% of universities in the world according to the QS World University Rankings 2023, with the Management School ranked as the best school in New Zealand for business and economics. Wintec is one of New Zealand's largest Institutes of Technology/Polytechnics and a leading provider of high-quality vocational and professional education in the Waikato region.

[3] Rotorua Lakes district is primarily part of the Bay of Plenty region, which contains the city of Rotorua. Approximately 38% of the district falls within the Waikato region, this being primarily rural land.
[4] The majority of Taupō district falls within the Waikato region, although parts are within the Bay of Plenty region, Manawatū-Whanganui region and Hawke's Bay region.
[5] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Socio-economic trends. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/community/about-the-waikato-region/community-and-economy/socio-economic-trends/
[6] Waikato Regional Council 2023. Hydroelectricity generation in Waikato. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/FreshwaterInfoSheetsHydroelecticity.pdf
[7] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Energy and extraction. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/geothermal/energy-and-extraction/
[8] NZQA 2025. Education Organisations in Waikato. https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers/results.do?regionCode=30
[9] New Zealand Immigration 2025. Education providers in Waikato. https://www.live-work.immigration.govt.nz/choose-new-zealand/regions-cities/waikato/education

Tourism destinations such as Karangahake Gorge, Waitomo Caves, Hobbiton Movie Set, the Te Waihou Walkway/Blue Springs, Lake Taupō and Huka Falls, Cathedral Cove, Raglan, Lake Karapiro, Hamilton Gardens and the many cycle trails are a vital part of the Waikato economy, contributing significantly to employment and regional growth.

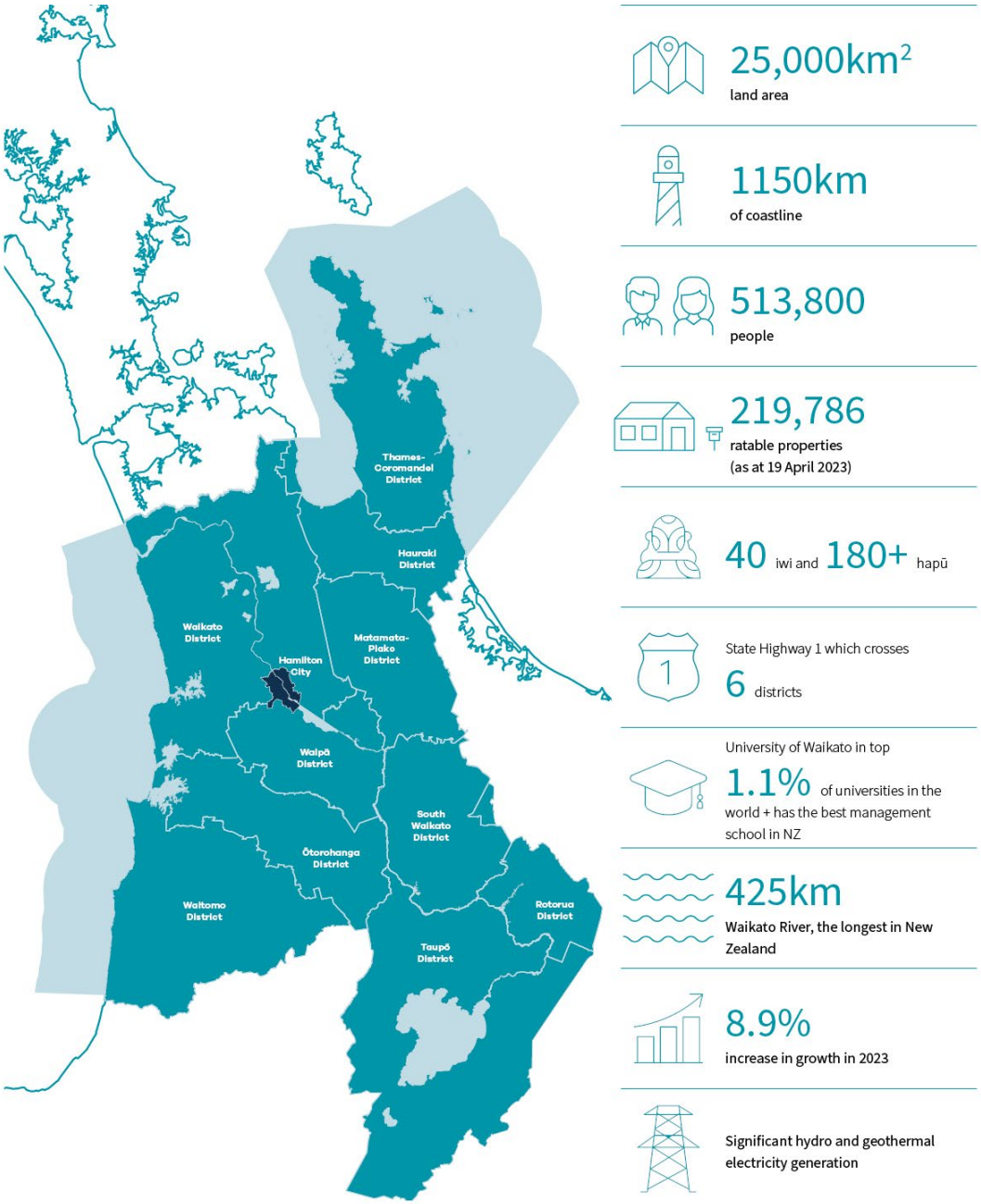


Figure 2: The Waikato Region at a glance.

4.1 Demographic and economic state of the region

The Waikato Region is home to an estimated 536,200 people[10] – around 10 percent of the total population of New Zealand. Approximately 59% of the region's population lives in urban areas, and 41% in rural areas.[11] The main urban centre of the region is Hamilton City, which is home to more than a third of the people of the region, with a population of about 192,000.[12] Nearly

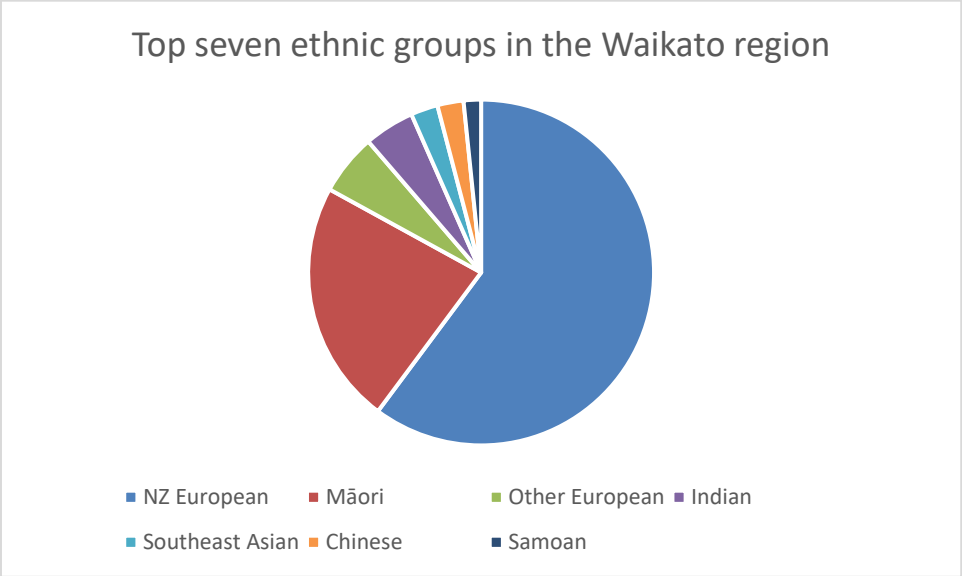
[10] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region 2024. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/growth?compare=waikato-region

[11] Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora 2025. Snapshot of Health New Zealand Waikato. https://www.waikatodhb.govt.nz/about-us/snapshot-of-waikato-dhb

[12] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region. Population growth – Hamilton City. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/growth?compare=hamilton-city

another 30% of the region's population lives in the districts of Waikato and Waipā that surround Hamilton. Population growth[13] in the region has averaged 2.0% per annum over the past five years, increasing by around 11,400 people in the year to June 2024.

The ethnic makeup of the region is similar to New Zealand overall; it is a diverse and multicultural society[14]. It has a significantly higher share of people identifying as Māori (25% compared to 17% nationally) and lower shares identifying as Pacific people or Asian. The age distribution of the Waikato population is also similar to that of New Zealand as a whole. However, this varies greatly across the region.



The Waikato is the fourth largest regional economy in New Zealand, total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021 was $29.2 billion, around 9% of the national economy. It is endowed with rich natural resources and its proximity to Auckland and the Bay of Plenty bring significant economic advantages. Links to Auckland and the Port of Tauranga provide ready access to export markets and make the region a crucial logistics hub. The region overall is very diverse, balancing the emerging metropolis of Hamilton as a centre of manufacturing and services, with highly varied and specialised local economies with comparative advantages based on primary industries.

The Waikato region is known as an agricultural (particularly dairy farming) region, largely due to its disproportionately large amount of highly productive land. Pastoral farming is now the dominant land use in the region, making up 53% of its total area. The various parts of the region have additional economic specialisations including mining, tourism, manufacturing, forestry, energy, fishing and aquaculture.

The eight dams and nine power stations of the Waikato River scheme provide a significant share of New Zealand's electricity, including up to 25% of daily peak supply. The region is home to the majority of New Zealand's geothermal energy infrastructure, which, as well as direct uses of geothermal heat, is a major contributor to the national electricity supply.

The 2018 New Zealand Index of Multiple Deprivation identified that the Waikato region has higher than average deprivation, with the median rank in the Waikato region being 13.9%[15]

[13] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region – Population growth. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/growth

[14] Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022. Strategy 2022 – 2025: A pathway to an Aotearoa where ethnic communities feel at home. 2022-2025_mec_strategy.pdf

[15] Waikato Regional Council 2021. Socio-economic deprivation in the Waikato Region. TR 2021/14. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/WRC-2019/TR202114.pdf

worse than New Zealand overall. This is linked to a key issue of housing affordability, only 64% of households in the region own their own homes – the third lowest rate in the country.

Waikato population projections are currently based on 2018 data and are currently being updated to reflect the 2023 census baseline. A 2021 Waikato Regional Council technical report[16] outlines the demographic projections of the Waikato region including low, medium and high scenarios for each of population, family and household, and labour force, to a projection horizon of 2068. The report projects overall growth for the region, but at a slower rate than previously experienced.

A WRC technical report published in 2023[17] profiles the Waikato Region's economy – its state in 2022 and the trajectory it is on. In characterising the state and trends of the regional economy, the report identifies several key opportunities and issues. The rising power of the Māori economy, an advantageous location, and diverse industries across the region are strengths for the region to leverage. Challenges include: economic outcomes for many are poor; productivity is stagnant; institutions may need to adapt to maintain the region's economic foundations, especially as external circumstances change. Appendix 3 summarises the key trends and statistics of the economic profile but the report should be referred to for detail on assumptions made and conclusions drawn.

An updated report – Waikato Region Economic Geographies Profiles[18] – prepared for WRC in early 2025 provides more up to date information on economic trends and possible economic development opportunities in the region. A draft version of the report was referred to while preparing this inventory. The draft report identifies functional economic areas to describe economic structures and linkages within the region. The economic profile for each area includes information on the labour market, consumers, businesses, key industries, recreation, infrastructure capacity, resilience, growth capacity, economic assets and opportunities. These profiles will be valuable for RSS development.

Councils' economic development plans are also useful to understand investment priorities, however these are not consistent across the region.

The below infographic provides a snapshot of demographic information about the Waikato region based on 2023 Census data. Detailed summaries of the region's demographic and economic profiles are contained in Appendix 4.

[16] Waikato Regional Council 2021. 2018-base Population, Family and Household, and Labour Force Projections for the Waikato Region, 2018-2068. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/WRC-2019/TR202122.pdf

[17] Waikato Regional Council 2023. The economy of the Waikato region in 2022. Waikato Regional Council Technical Report 2022-17. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

[18] Gordon M, Foy D, Yeoman R. 2025. Waikato Region Economic Geographies Profiles. Prepared by Formative Limited for the Waikato Regional Council, February 2025. Document # 31452260.

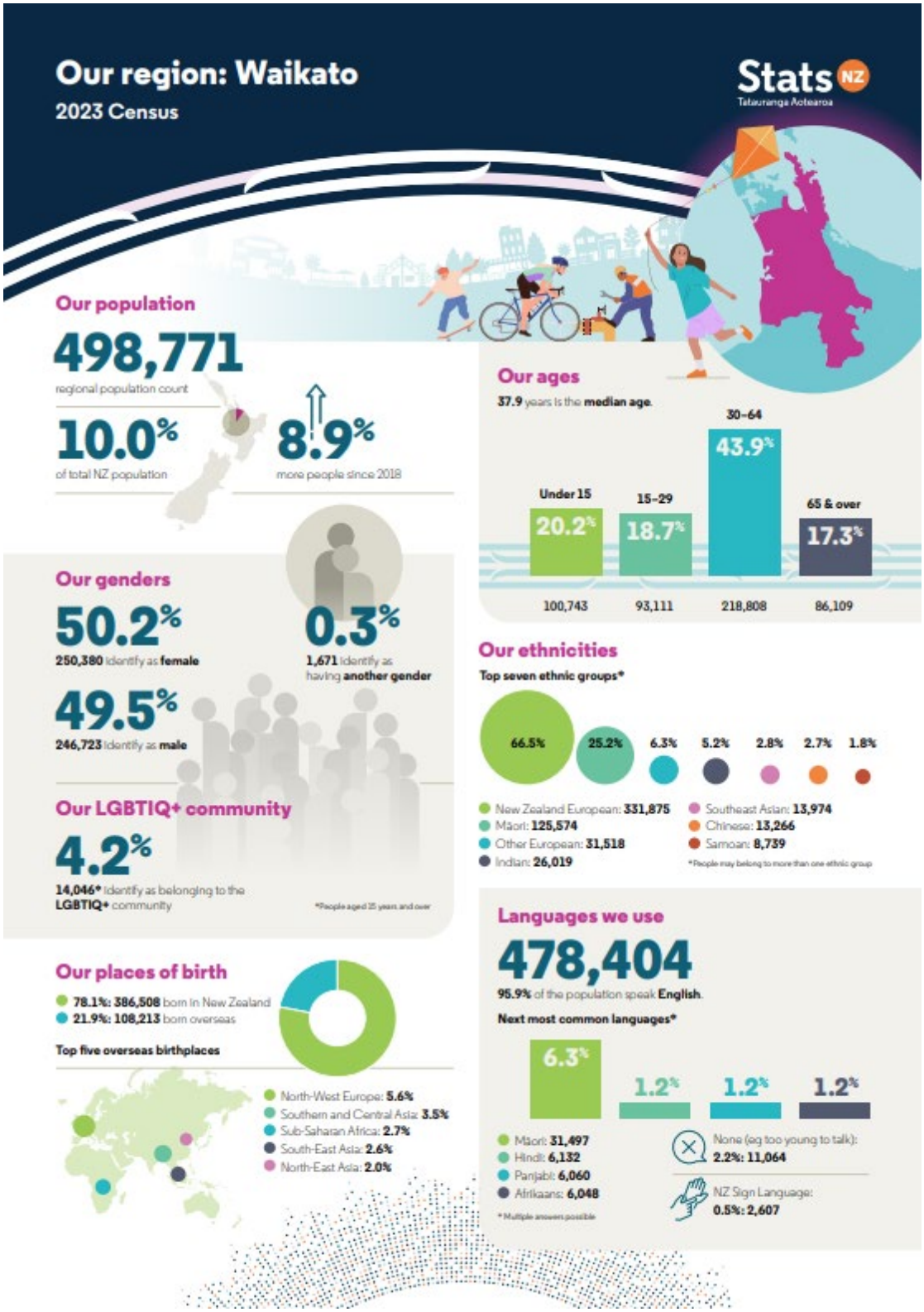


Figure 3: Our region: Waikato - 2023 Census data[19]

4.2 Waikato City and Regional Deal proposal

WRC developed and lodged a regional deal proposal, approved by the Waikato Mayoral Forum, on 28 February 2025. The regional deal proposal will provide the region with a foundational workstream that will underpin an RSS.

Regional Deals is the government's initiative for establishing long-term agreements between central and local government. The programme unlocks funding and resource opportunities to

[19] Stats NZ 2025. Our region: Waikato: 2023 Census. https://www.stats.govt.nz/infographics/detailed-regional-infographics-from-2023-census/our-region-waikato/

support councils to make improvements in their region through existing and planned projects, for example to roads, infrastructure and the supply of quality housing.

The Waikato City and Regional Deal proposal highlights Hamilton's growth trajectory and the inter-regional and national benefits of investment in the Waikato region. Prioritised projects focus on the deal objectives - building economic growth, delivering connected and resilient infrastructure, and improving the supply of affordable and quality housing.

The existing and planned projects in the proposal will bring a range of benefits for the Waikato region, such as well functioning urban developments, significant job growth and housing supply, improved resilience on key transport corridors, more resilient communities, efficient freight networks, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved tourist experiences, increased electricity generation, economic diversification and certainty of water supply.

Key projects include, but are not limited to:

- Network improvements to support the Roads of National Significance (RONS), including Hamilton Southern Links, Cambridge to Piarere expressway extension, and SH29 Tauriko West project.
- Support for the golden triangle road and rail investment programme.
- Delivery of the Future Proof priority development areas package, with a suite of initiatives including the Huntly wastewater plant, Ruakura, north Waipā/southern Hamilton, Hamilton central city,).
- Support for the growing rural centres programme, for example in Paeroa, Putāruru, Thames-Coromandel, Matamata.
- Construction of resilient transport corridors for rural communities through the Thames-Coromandel Resilience Programme, on SH3 to Taranaki and SH1 Taupō to Desert Road.
- Infrastructure that supports tourism destinations.
- Investment in the region's solar, wind and bioenergy.
- Water security.

4.3 Key stakeholders for a Waikato RSS

The below diagram illustrates the key stakeholders who will be involved in developing and implementing an RSS for the Waikato region. The inner circle reflects those with key interest and influence and the outer circle are those that will provide input and help implement it but have less direct resource management and regional development functions and responsibilities.

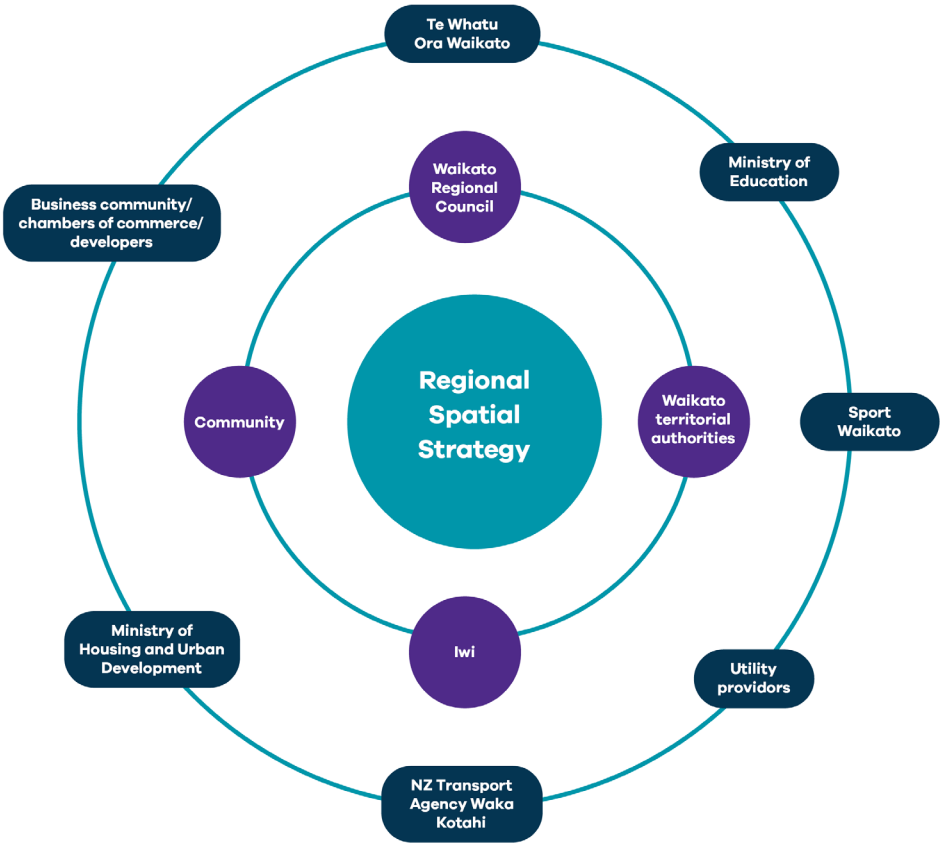


Figure 4: Key stakeholders for an RSS in the Waikato region.

The below table sets out government agencies' aspirations and existing work in strategic, spatial and/or infrastructure planning that should be taken into account when thinking about future placemaking in the Waikato region. This excludes local authorities' outcomes and existing work that is set out in the following sections.

Agency	Functions and existing work related to strategic planning
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD)	MHUD has a lead role for the housing and urban development system in New Zealand and are jointly responsible with the Ministry for the Environment for the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) 2020. Changes to the NPS-UD, including the Future Development Strategy requirements, are currently being pursued as part of the Government's Going for Housing Growth Programme[20] that feeds into Resource Management Reform Phase 3. This programme involves: 1. Freeing up land for urban development, including removing some planning barriers. 2. Improving infrastructure funding and financing to support urban growth. 3. Providing incentives for communities and councils to support growth. MHUD takes an advocacy and support role in spatial planning projects across New Zealand to implement the Future Development Strategy provisions in the NPS-UD or as part of urban growth partnerships. In some cases MHUD can provide technical input and coordinate government engagement.
New Zealand Transport	The National Land Transport Programme[21] (NLTP) is a three-year programme that sets out how Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, working with its partners, plans to invest the National Land Transport Fund to create a safer, more accessible, better connected

[20] Ministry of Housing and Urban Development 2024. Going for Housing Growth programme. https://www.hud.govt.nz/our-work/going-for-housing-growth-programme

[21] Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency 2024. 2024-27 National Land Transport Programme. https://www.nzta.govt.nz/planning-and-investment/national-land-transport-programme/2024-27-nltp/

Agency – Waka Kotahi	and more resilient land transport system that keeps New Zealand moving. Activities in the NLTP must reflect the priorities in the most recent Government Policy Statement on land transport. The NLTP is informed by Regional Land Transport Plans. A total of $1.9 billion is forecast to be invested in Waikato in the 2024-27 NLTP period primarily across maintenance operations, pothole prevention, improvements and public transport. Two new Roads of National Significance (RoNS) projects are identified within the region – SH1 Cambridge to Piarere and Hamilton Southern Links. The SH1/SH29 Piarere intersection improvements is a Road of Regional Significance project. The Crown Resilience Programme[22] is an investment programme for proactive resilience improvements to protect the transport network. There are a range of projects confirmed for the Waikato region on both state highways and local roads. Arataki[23] is a 30-year plan for the transport system. It was last updated in 2023. Arataki identifies the types of national, system-wide activities Waka Kotahi considers necessary for the land transport system to achieve long-term outcomes and government priorities. It sets out the national approach to transport modes and the strategic network. Arataki also provides guidance for regional direction. A key action identified for the Waikato region is to progress joint spatial planning work to make progress towards reducing transport emissions. Other key actions for the region are set out relating to environmental sustainability, healthy and safe people, inclusive access, economic prosperity, resilience and security. Arataki is underpinned by interactive geospatial maps that provide spatial information on the current transport network and future focus areas for transport, showing where significant future interventions and activities may be required to address a high level of service deficiency. Waka Kotahi is also currently undertaking two strategic studies in the Waikato region – the Hamilton to Tauranga corridor and Piarere to Desert Road corridor. Waka Kotahi acknowledges a need to work with local government to develop responses to climate change, resilience issues and system security.
Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora and Ministry of Health (MoH)	The Pae Ora Strategies[24] under provide a long-term vision where all people and their whānau, regardless of background, can achieve their best possible health. They were released in July 2023. The seven strategies are: • New Zealand Health Strategy • Health of Disabled People Strategy • Pae Tū: Hauora Māori strategy • Rare Disorders Strategy • Rural Health Strategy • Te Mana Ola: The Pacific Health Strategy • Women's Health Strategy The Government Policy Statement on Health 2024-27[25] (GPS) sets out the priorities and expectations for the health system to deliver and achieve, and how success will be measured, monitored, and reported. The two priorities most relevant to an RSS are:

[22] Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency 2025. Crown Resilience Programme (CRP). https://www.nzta.govt.nz/planning-and-investment/crown-resilience-programme/

[23] Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency 2023. Arataki – 30-year plan. September 2023 v1.1. https://www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/planning-and-investment/arataki/arataki-30-year-plan/docs/Final-Arataki.pdf

[24] Ministry of Health 2025. Pae Ora Strategies. https://www.health.govt.nz/strategies-initiatives/health-strategies/pae-ora-strategies

[25] Minister of Health. 2024. Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

	• Access – ensuring all New Zealanders have equitable access to the health care services they need, no matter where they live; and • Infrastructure – ensuring that the health system is resilient and has the digital and physical infrastructure it needs to meet people's needs now and the future. Other priorities in the GPS are timeliness, quality and workforce. Te Pae Tata[26] is the interim New Zealand Health plan prepared by Health New Zealand and Te Aka Whai Ora – the Māori Health Authority. A key part of this plan is the delivery of a national asset management strategy and investment plan and nationally consistent strategic networks to develop a unified health system. A key issue for Health New Zealand is how to provide effective services and systems for an aging population. It will be important for an RSS to consider how to provide for an aging population across the region in collaboration with MoH to provide retirement living facilities and access to community transport services.
Ministry of Education (MoE)	MoE's purpose is to shape an educational system that delivers equitable and excellent outcomes. The School Property Strategy 2030[27] sets out how school property management will align with MoE's strategic long-term priorities. MoE manages school networks nationwide in order to be able to plan for sufficient capacity in the schooling network. This involves monitoring population projections (particularly for school-aged children), planned housing developments, census data, local council information, school utilisation and capacity and enrolment data and engaging with local authorities through local and sub-regional spatial planning processes. The National Education Growth Plan 2030[28] was released in 2019 and updated in 2022 and identifies how MoE plans to manage growth across the 39 highest growth catchments in the country. Four of these catchments are located in the Waikato region. Actions include opening new schools and funding additional classrooms an student places at existing schools, amending enrolment schemes and delivering short-term teaching spaces while permanent property is being delivered. A future planned action is to develop a regional plan for Māori medium education provision to provide a connected pathway across the rohe for all ākonga. The National Education Network Plan[29] was updated in 2024 and shows where MoE expects changes in population to affect plans for the schooling network. This identifies additional actions for the Waikato region including discussions with iwi for the development of an iwi focused school in the Ruakura area in Hamilton. Te Tira Hou[30] is an education report providing information on the Māori medium education network, including background on the proposed future direction and planning for the development of the network on Kaupapa Māori and Māori medium kura and rumaki units.

[26] Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora 2022. Te Pae Tata Interim New Zealand Health Plan. https://www.tewhatuora.govt.nz/publications/te-pae-tata-interim-new-zealand-health-plan-2022

[27] Ministry of Education 2020. Te Rautaki Rawa Kura – The School Property Strategy 2030. https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2023-12/MOE-Te-Rautaki-Rawa-Kura-The-School-Property-Strategy-2030.pdf?VersionId=Pq8_bVPzfNuQYifuoE7jnIzpej8TeCM1

[28] Ministry of Education 2022. National Education Growth Plan 2030 – 2022 update. https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-12/NEGP%20updates%202021.pdf?VersionId=35hIqcy3uiFfv22LBQT7uOH3ULfRuWLn

[29] Ministry of Education 2024. National Education Network Plans Update – March 2024. https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-12/National-Education-Network-Plans-2024-Update.pdf?VersionId=3ONIyta4k5gIpvQT5lVxkShEckH5uzjJ

[30] Ministry of Education 2024. Te Tira Hou – Kaupapa Māori and Māori medium education networks. https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-08/Te%20Tira%20Hou%202024.pdf?VersionId=lprRF_ptBtx6bpeYIVy0RVVpM.x5I4dq

Other relevant organisations that work in placemaking that may be able to provide input into an RSS include:

- Sport Waikato - Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan 2024
- Regional tourism entities – Destination Management Plans
    - Hamilton and Waikato Tourism
    - Destination Great Lake Taupō (Love Taupō)
    - Destination Hauraki Coromandel
- The Northern Infrastructure Forum.

4.4 Waikato Regional Council policy context

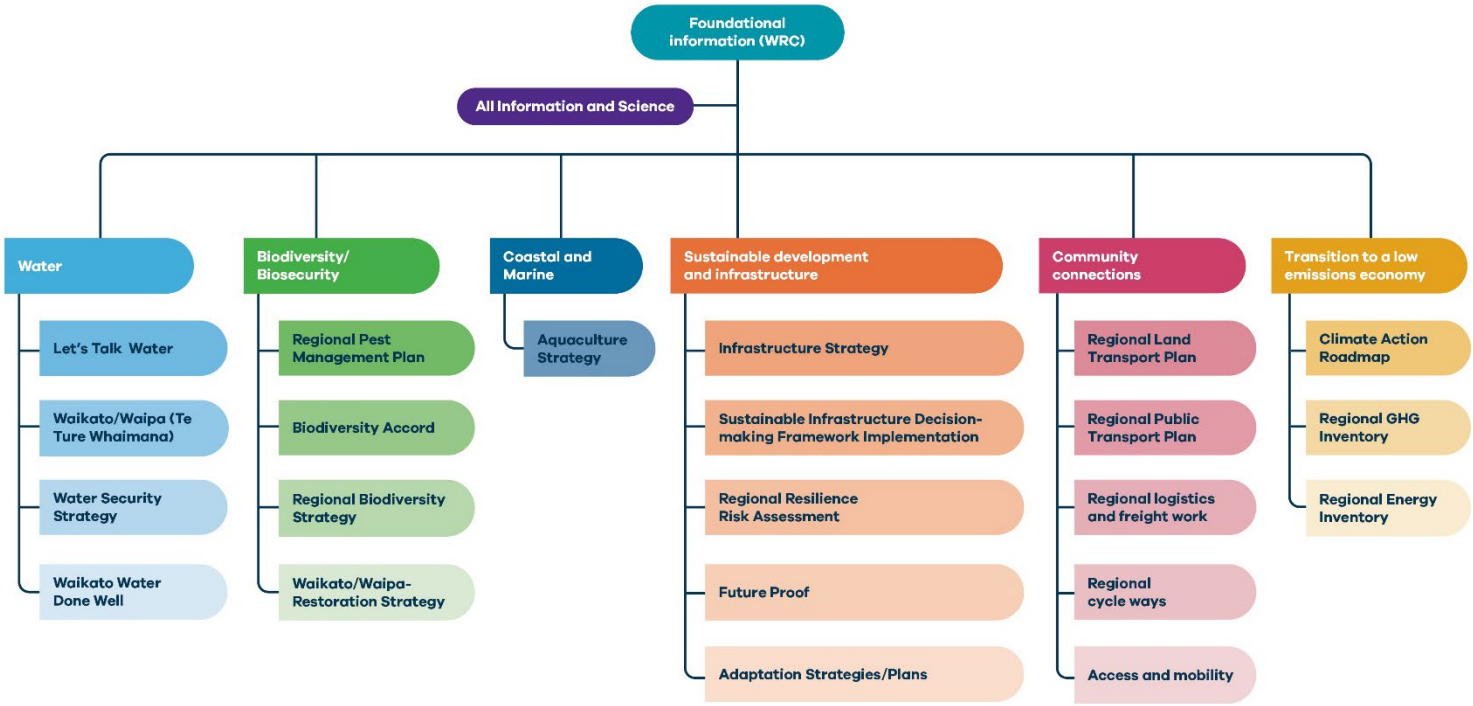


Figure 5: Waikato Regional Council strategic policy context

Strategic priorities

WRC's Strategic Direction 2023-2025, Takatū Waikato, Making a Stand for the Waikato, sets out the vision, purpose and six strategic priorities that guide council's work. A focus on responding to climate change and resilience is woven through all six of the strategic priorities, which are reflective of the topics an RSS might address:

- Water
- Biodiversity and biosecurity
- Coastal and marine
- Sustainable development and infrastructure
- Community connections
- Transition to a low emissions economy.

WRC's current long term plan reflects the strategic direction and council has a range of plans, strategies and workstreams that implement the priorities. The strategic priorities are set out in more detail in Appendix 4.

Waikato Regional Policy Statement

The Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) is a statutory document under the RMA that provides an overview of the resource management issues in the Waikato region and the ways

in which integrated management of the region's natural and physical resources will be achieved. The WRPS became operative in 2016 and is due for review in 2026.

The significant resource management issues for the Waikato region identified in the RPS are reflective of the types of issues an RSS might address. The issues are:

- State of resources
- Effects of climate change
- Providing for energy demand
- Managing the built environment
- Relationship of tangata whenua with the environment (te taiao)
- Health and wellbeing of the Waikato River catchment.

The WRPS does not contain specific direction for regional strategic spatial planning but it includes direction across four domains and seven topics that guide land use planning across the region that may translate into an RSS. The domains and topics of the WRPS align with the key themes of regional spatial planning, including:

- Air
- Coastal environment
- Geothermal
- Land and freshwater
- Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity
- Energy, infrastructure and transport
- Hazards and risks
- Historical and cultural values
- Natural character, and
- Urban form and development.

The concept of strategic planning is embedded in policies and methods through these domains and topics. Policy IM-P1 directs for an integrated approach to resource management to be adopted that takes a long-term strategic approach that recognises the changing environment and changing resource use pressures and trends. Method IM-M12 states WRC will investigate the use of integrated spatial planning tools including to explore alternative long-term development options and associated trade-offs. Other policies and methods that relate to strategic and spatial planning are set out in Appendix 4.

The WRPS also includes spatial information that could feed into an RSS, such as geothermal systems, fresh water bodies and wetlands of high value, significant transport infrastructure, outstanding natural features and landscapes and growth areas in the Future-Proof subregion.

Future Proof

Future Proof was first formed in 2007 to manage growth and provide certainty for public and private investment in infrastructure (in particular the Waikato Expressway) and land development in the Waikato sub-region, covering Waikato District, Hamilton City and Waipā District (and more recently Matamata-Piako District). The partnership is made up of local government partners Waikato Regional Council, Waipā District Council, Waikato District Council, Hamilton City Council and Matamata-Piako District Council (and Auckland Council in relation to the Hamilton-Auckland corridor), central government partners and iwi.

The resulting Future Proof Strategy has provided a strategic, integrated approach to long-term planning and growth management in the sub-region. The Strategy was updated in 2017 and then again 2022 to include spatial plans - the He Awarua ki te Oranga: The Hamilton to Auckland Corridor Plan and the Hamilton-Waikato Metropolitan Spatial Plan, and in 2024 to meet the requirements of a Future Development Strategy under the NPS-UD. As a sub-regional spatial strategy, it is the closest example of an RSS that exists in the region currently.

The Strategy identifies where and how residential and business growth will be provided for over the long term (30+ years), in both existing and future urban areas. It is informed by and aligned with a housing and business development capacity assessment (HBA) as required by the NPS-UD. An HBA is an assessment of the demand for land in urban environments, and the development capacity that is sufficient to meet that demand in the short, medium and long term. The most recent HBA provided information on residential, commercial, retail and industrial land demand including floorspace area. It also provided detail to help understand the impacts of planning and infrastructure decisions on the housing market and the affordability of the housing market in the subregion. This work will be useful to inform an RSS.

Future Proof is also currently undertaking spatial planning work for the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor and the North Waipā / South Hamilton / Hamilton Airport area. There may be learnings around process, issues and data constraints from these studies that may have relevance at a regional scale.

4.5 Territorial authority policy context

The territorial authorities of the Waikato region have each undertaken their own strategic/spatial planning work, ranging from sub-regional growth strategies and district-wide spatial plans to place-based town concept plans community plans. Figure 5 below maps out the existing spatial planning work in the Waikato region.

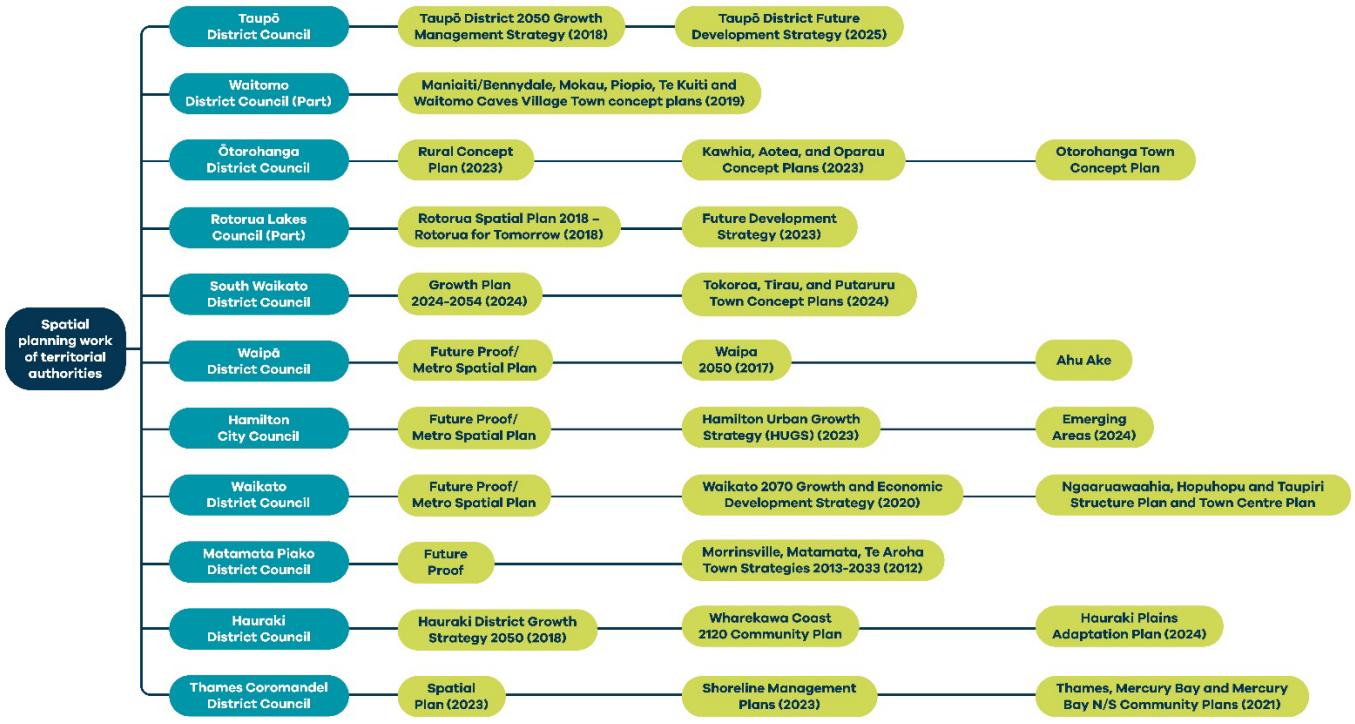


Figure 6: Spatial planning work undertaken by the territorial authorities of the Waikato region

Territorial authorities also have a range of other plans and strategies that contain information that may be relevant to an RSS, including infrastructure strategies, biodiversity strategies, climate change strategies, economic development strategies, transport plans, conservation plans, etc.

Key spatial planning work undertaken by the Waikato's territorial authorities are highlighted below and further summarised in Appendix 5.

This inventory does not go into detail on district plans, however it is acknowledged that information contained in district plans, particularly spatial information, will be key inputs to an RSS.

Hamilton City Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Hamilton Urban Growth Strategy (HUGS) 2023

Waikato District Council

- Enhanced Annual Plan 2024-2025
- Waikato 2070 – Growth and Economic Development Strategy 2020
- Waikato Blueprint
- Town centre and structure plans

Waipā District Council

- Enhanced Annual Plan 2024-2025
- Ahu Ake – Waipā Community Spatial Plan
- Waipā 2050 – District Growth Strategy

Matamata Piako District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Town strategies

Thames-Coromandel District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Thames Spatial Plan 2022
- Shoreline Management Pathways
- Community Plans

Hauraki District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Hauraki District Growth Strategy 2050
- Wharekawa Coast 2120
- Hauraki Plains Adaptation Plan

South Waikato District Council

- LTP
- South Waikato Growth Plan 2024-2054

Ōtorohanga District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Town concept plans

Waitomo District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Town concept plans

Rotorua-Lakes District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Rotorua Future Development Strategy 2023

Taupō District Council

- LTP 2024-2034
- Taupō District 2050 – Growth Management Strategy

4.6 Iwi management plans

An iwi management plan is a document developed and approved by iwi to address matters of resource management activity of significance within their respective rohe (region). The plans often contain information relating to specific cultural values, historical accounts and descriptions of areas of interest (hapū/iwi boundaries). These plans are taken into account by the council in the management of the region's natural resources, providing a formal way for iwi interests to be incorporated into the council's decision making.

For the purpose of this inventory, iwi management plans provide insight into the outcomes sought by iwi from resource management planning, and actions currently being undertaken by iwi that may influence spatial planning for the region.

There are 26 iwi management plans in the Waikato region:

1. Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River
2. Waikato-Tainui Environmental Management Plan
3. Ngāti Hinerangi – Deed of Mandate
4. Ngāti Tūwharetoa Iwi Environmental Management Plan
5. Te Arawa River Iwi Trust – Environmental Management Plan
6. Te Arawa River Iwi Trust – Fisheries Plan
7. Rising above the mist – Te arana ake i te taimahatanga: Ngāti Tahu - Ngāti Whaoa Iwi Environmental Management Plan
8. Tahinga Environmental Management Plan
9. Te Rautaki Taiao a Raukawa – Raukawa Environmental Management Plan
10. Raukawa Fisheries Plan
11. Ngāti Porou ki Hauraki Plan
12. Ngāti Hikairo Iwi Management Plan
13. Ngāti Hikairo Iwi Management Plan – Freshwater
14. Ngāti Haua Environmental Management Plan
15. Maniapoto Environmental Management Plan
16. Maniapoto Priorities for the Restoration of the Waipā River Catchment
17. Maniapoto Upper Waipā River Fisheries Plan
18. Ka Ru a Putama – Te Whakauakitanga o Poutama (Iwi Management Plan)
19. Mōtakotako Marae Hapu Management Plan
20. Hineuru Environmental Management Plan
21. Ngāti Kea Ngāti Tuara Iwi Environmental Management Plan
22. Hauraki – Whaia te Māhere Taiao o Hauraki
23. He Māhere Pūtahitanga: A pan-tribal Iwi Planning Document on behalf of the Central North Island Forests Iwi Collective (2018)
24. Ngaati Whanaunga Environmental Management Plan
25. Te Mata Heranga – Ngāti Tamainupō Hapū Environmental Management Plan.
26. Ngaati Mahuta Ki Te Hauaauru Environmental Management Plan.

This inventory relies on previous literature reviews of iwi management plans to gain a general understanding of the key issues for mana whenua in the region that may inform an RSS. In particular, the iwi management plans applicable to the Waikato region were reviewed in early 2021[31] for the purpose of identifying the overall vision they promoted and implications that the Waikato Regional Policy Statement may have on their implementation. This work was not peer-reviewed but is a useful guide to identify iwi priorities and areas where the regional policy is not currently meeting iwi expectations. The value of this work is to recognise the time and effort invested by iwi in preparing iwi management plans.

Key issues and goals identified across iwi management plans that may be addressed by an RSS are set out in Appendix 6.

[31] Waikato Regional Council 2021. Review of Iwi Management Plans, document #17885813

Māori unique perspectives, knowledge and aspirations are essential to ensuring that an RSS reflects the values and needs of communities within our region, and iwi involvement will begin in the next stage of the RSS development process following this inventory. At this next stage a more fulsome review of iwi aspirations contained in iwi management plans is recommended. It is understood that it is only through direct, active engagement with tangata whenua that the context of this review can be confirmed and given detail.

4.7 Opportunities, issues and challenges

Councils' LTPs and community outcomes, alongside their strategic and policy documents provide insight into the current opportunities, issues and challenges across the region and those that are of highest priority.

Appendix 7 sets out the community outcomes of each council in the Waikato region. In summary, outcomes fall under the four wellbeings – social, economic, environmental and cultural. Some local authorities provide more detail on how the outcomes will be achieved while others set out outcomes as broad statements. All outcomes are focused on people and place, with concepts such as vibrancy, sustainability, connectedness, resilience and economic stability common across the region.

Appendix 8 contains a summarised PESTLE scan, highlighting the key political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental opportunities and challenges that councils and communities across the region have identified. This is based on the policy analysis of council strategic and planning documents and also a 2022 discussion document on PESTLE[32] trends for the Waikato region that was prepared to inform the most recent update of WRC's Strategic Direction. This document provides a much more fulsome explanation of the forces of change behind the opportunities and challenges identified, relating to:

- Climate change and urgency for climate action
- Geopolitical instability impacts on migration, supply chain, health and wellbeing, cost of living and economic growth
- Technological change and advances
- Increase in Māori development
- Global economic stressors
- Ongoing Covid-19 impacts
- Government reform
- Social and demographic change.

From this analysis of the context of the Waikato region, and considering the purpose of spatial planning, this inventory identifies five key issues and opportunities to inform the collation of information for an RSS. These are briefly identified below, particularly in terms of current LTP investment by councils, and expanded on throughout this Inventory.

1. Climate change and natural hazards

It is clear across the region that councils and their communities are currently concerned about severe weather events and climate change, including the costs of recovering from them, improving assets that no longer offer protection, and preparing for more. Reflecting these concerns, current LTPs across the region are prioritising building resilience over the next ten years.

Territorial authorities have begun formulating Climate Change response plans. There are opportunities to better plan for unexpected weather events – shifting from a reactive to proactive approach. This includes upgrades to depreciating assets either at the end of their

[32] Waikato Regional Council 2022. Trends for the Waikato Region: A discussion. October 2022.

lifecycle or overwhelmed by weather events. Councils are also making moves to lower greenhouse gas emissions via programme funding.

Waikato's natural resources and infrastructure position it to lead New Zealand's transition to a low-emissions economy, decarbonizing exports and meeting market expectations for low-carbon products, while upskilling the regional workforce.

2. Infrastructure capacity

Infrastructure renewal and maintenance continue to be key themes across Councils' LTPs and top-of-mind for communities.

Water assets have become a major focus for investments following the government's direction regarding three waters[33] and communities continue to be concerned about three waters uncertainties. LTP budgets have been significantly altered to accommodate the reintroduction of the costs associated with water asset management. Growth within the region has put a strain on current wastewater systems and stormwater networks, and some urban areas need their pipes upgraded. Many territorial authorities are also planning upgrades to water treatment plants and water mains to ensure they are up to standard.

In terms of transport infrastructure, councils have identified a challenge in maintaining roads to their current standard yet demands for newer, safer, and more efficient roads are high.

3. Economic development and urban growth

It is a regional deal priority initiative to turbo charge economic development and housing provision through efficient inter-regional transport corridors. There are opportunities for councils to work with iwi and the private sector to develop long-term plans for encouraging well connected, sustainable economic growth along these corridors, starting with the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor and around Hamilton Airport (work currently underway by Future Proof). This also connects to the Roads of National Significance identified by the Government (SH1 Cambridge to Piarere and Hamilton Southern Links).

The key drivers for growth and economic development in the Waikato region include:

- Strategic location and diversified and fast-growing economy
- Resource rich: fertile agricultural land, reliable water supply and temperate climate is ideal for primary production
- Energy powerhouse featuring the Tongariro/Tokaānū and Waikato hydroelectric power schemes, abundant geothermal generation, and significant potential for renewable solar and wind generation
- Valuable mineral resources, from gold in the Hauraki District to iron in Waitomo
- Extensive marine area, covering more than 10,000 km2, accommodates significant marine industries
- Adjacent to Auckland and Tauranga: Access to the Port of Tauranga and rapid growth spilling over from Auckland
- Infrastructure – including road and rail – that effectively brings Waikato, Auckland (and Tauranga) closer together will solidify Waikato's role as a logistics hub and improving supply chain efficiency.

4. Social inequity

Social inequity varies spatially across the region, particularly in terms of access to core services. The 2018 New Zealand Index of Multiple Deprivation identified that the Waikato region has higher than average deprivation.

Affordability and availability of houses is an important issue regionwide. LTPs are prioritising zoning areas for building new homes or upgrading existing buildings to an acceptable standard.

[33] Department of Internal Affairs 2025. Local Water Done Well legislation. https://www.dia.govt.nz/Water-Services-Policy-legislation-and-process

Elderly housing affordability and standards is also a key concern, particularly in districts with a high ageing population.

Councils are also prioritising investments in their districts to create safe and connected communities through development of common areas, parks, cycleways, community facilities, skate parks and playgrounds. This provides opportunity to attract and stimulate growth.

5. Declining state of the environment

The region is experiencing declining natural capital, including indigenous biodiversity and essential ecosystem services, as well as declining water quality due to nutrient concentrations.

Councils are seeking to increase native wildlife and vegetation via programme funding and planting. Work on a Regional Biodiversity Strategy is also underway to protect and restore biodiversity across the region.

5 Regional themes

High level themes have been identified to represent the information gathered in this inventory. The themes have been determined based on the topics commonly included in spatial plans and strategy as identified in this report's literature review and the key opportunities, issues and challenges across the Waikato region identified in section 4 above.

Within these themes, a series of key questions are posed that an RSS for the Waikato region might respond to. These questions are based on the opportunities and challenges identified across the region and guided the collation of spatial information for this inventory. It is not the purpose of the inventory to answer these questions, but rather investigate what information is available to assist in providing answers during the development of an RSS.

5.1 Development and growth

For the most part, growth is concentrated around existing settlements across the region. Rural residential growth also occurs sporadically across the region. The potential for development and growth differs across the region. In smaller districts and towns residential and business growth tends to be accommodated around the fringes of townships in new greenfield developments, with some capacity for additional growth in existing parts of the towns. In larger settlements, more growth can be accommodated through infill housing and intensification.

Many territorial authorities across the region are still investigating options for future growth, particularly of business land, and so an RSS may be able to provide guidance around this. Business land shortage and future locations for growth may be better assessed at a regional level given the market and circle of influence for businesses, particularly industrial, do not necessarily correlate with territorial boundaries.

There are a number of constraints to growth across the region, including outstanding natural features and landscapes, flood prone areas, protected areas and highly productive soils that mean development should proceed with caution or be avoided in certain areas. For example, if acid sulphate soils are present in an area being developed, specific construction methods, management controls and procedures should be undertaken to avoid or minimise effects on infrastructure and the environment.

The key constraint for most councils is infrastructure capacity. In many cases, development is not able to proceed until infrastructure upgrades, primarily transport and three waters infrastructure, are funded and progressed. This 'who pays' is a key issue across the region.

Future Proof identifies the challenges of adequately servicing growth in the wider Hamilton area, including limited public transport available outside of Hamilton City, protected and flood prone areas and peat soils.

There has been a long-term decline in rainfall leading to lower water balances throughout the region. This, combined with increasing demand for water means that limits to water allocation are being reached in some areas, thus having implications for development and growth.

While these constraints prove challenging for growth, opportunities exist to unlock development potential, turbo-charge economic development, and support community and iwi aspirations for well-functioning urban environments, through future transport infrastructure improvements for inter- and intra-regional transport corridors.

The key regional questions relating to development and growth are based around how to enable and provide good intensified urban form that doesn't infringe or prevent the continued functioning of the surrounding productive environment:

- Where are the current and future growth areas in the region (the expected settlement pattern) and what land uses are planned for these areas?
- What areas should be avoided for development and urban growth?
- What infrastructure may be needed in the future to support development and growth?
- Where are the key rural/agricultural areas currently that should be excluded from urban development and growth?
- What are the issues and opportunities for rural land use development over time?
- What conflicts exist between other RSS priorities and development and growth?
- How can local authorities meet their housing capacity targets in the long-term?

5.2 Infrastructure

The main challenge of adequately servicing growth, particularly when growth is higher than projected, is the pressure placed on infrastructure.

Infrastructure includes the fundamental fixed physical assets, structures and networks that support communities and contribute to quality of life. These assets can be divided into broad sectors, specifically transport, water, energy, social and communications. Infrastructure needs to be good quality and able to meet the changing needs of communities.

Infrastructure is planned, funded and operated by a number of organisations both nationally and locally. Infrastructure planning, funding and delivery are highly complex tasks that create coordination challenges within and between central and local government and the private sector. Relationships and channels already exist within and outside of the Waikato region that contribute to cross-boundary infrastructure planning, including the National Infrastructure Commission, the Upper North Island Strategic Alliance (UNISA), the Waikato Mayoral Forum and the Future Proof partnership.

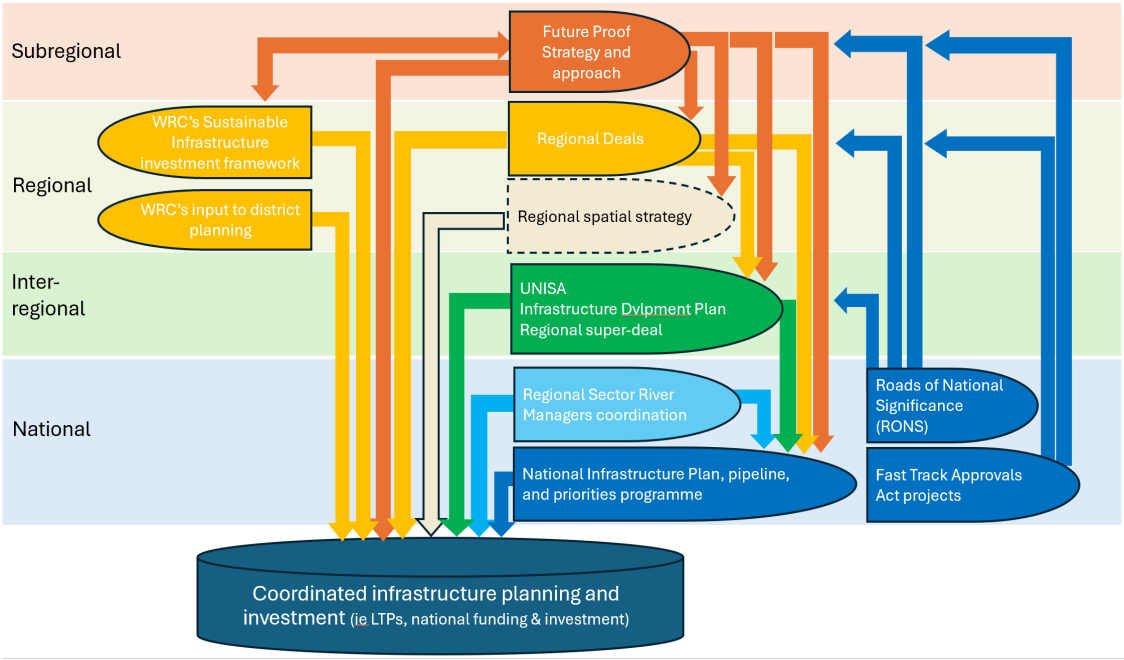


Figure 7: Current processes towards coordinated infrastructure planning and investment in Waikato region

Despite the ongoing work in the infrastructure space, there is often limited understanding of the implications of changing demand that can compromise future infrastructure planning given the long lead times for infrastructure projects. As such, a key role of an RSS will be to highlight the infrastructure needs of communities in the broader context of other regional issues to provide insight on where infrastructure investment is most needed.

Current key infrastructure focuses from a regional perspective are:

- Protection of key national infrastructure assets including State Highways and the North Island Main Trunk Line and East Coast Main Trunk. The region's strategic inter- and intra-strategic corridors (road and rail) play a vital role contributing to regional and national prosperity and productivity.
- Protection of urban and rural people and communities from natural hazards and climate change.
- Protection of the region's productivity capacity, particularly the main industries of dairy, meat, horticulture and forestry.

The key infrastructure issue for the Waikato is that funding resources are insufficient. Infrastructure upgrades, renewal and new projects are largely funded by ratepayers, often through targeted levies on the part of the community most impacted or benefitted most. This, combined with the decreasing viability and increasing unaffordability of maintaining or replacing ageing infrastructure assets means councils are not able to keep up with the demands of infrastructure provision.

Other challenges for infrastructure provision in the Waikato region include:

- Risk to infrastructure assets from climate change and natural hazards, affecting the level of service that existing infrastructure can provide.
- Adaptability of existing infrastructure and infrastructure planning to new technology and changing preferences.
- Dependencies on finite resources and minerals.

There are however opportunities to explore in infrastructure planning. Economic development and infrastructure provision are key priorities of the government and the need for partnership between local and central government to deliver infrastructure is currently being addressed through the regional deals process being undertaken by central government. The Fast-Track

Approvals Act is expected to simplify and speed up the consenting process for nationally and regionally significant infrastructure, and many projects in the Waikato region have already been shortlisted.

Economic growth can be fuelled through harnessing the region's location, resources and assets. Enhancing transport corridors, increasing investment in energy resources, upgrading tourism infrastructure and implementing a water security plan will be key to this.

Other opportunities for infrastructure provision in the Waikato region that may be explored through an RSS include:

- Using infrastructure to support economic diversification, sustainability, and wellbeing, as well as population growth and structural changes.
- Utilising asset renewals to replace ageing infrastructure with new assets that are more resilient to climate change and are more flexible to support the community to adopt future new economic activities as they arise.
- Exploring how Māori world views and mātauranga Māori can support intergenerational and long-term thinking in infrastructure development.
- Transition to a low emissions economy through innovation trends in transport – electrification, shared mobility and automation.
- Facilitate an increase in access to and use of renewable energy. Distributed energy infrastructure and clean energy, including cable corridors for offshore wind.
- Transitioning to green infrastructure that is more resilient to climate change and can also provide amenity benefits to the community.
- Guide industries and communities to reduce use of fossil fuels and increase energy efficiency in our transition to a resilient, low emissions economy.

The key regional questions relating to infrastructure that an RSS should seek to answer are:

- What are the region's key infrastructure assets?
    - Water
    - Transport
    - Energy
    - Social
    - Communications
    - Other infrastructure.
- What are the region's key infrastructure needs?
- Is additional infrastructure needed within the region to support other parts of New Zealand?
- What are the infrastructure management issues and opportunities for more efficient management of infrastructure in the region?
- What are the priorities for and means to fund future infrastructure provision?

5.3 Natural environment

In the pursuit of growth and development, it is often the natural environment that is compromised. There is a constant tension in resource management planning that involves determining the line at which the effects on the environment are minimal enough to permit a land use.

The region is experiencing declining natural capital, including indigenous biodiversity and essential ecosystem services. The region's 25,000km^2 of land have been transformed over the last 150 years, with around three-quarters of native land cover converted to farms and exotic forests and drained of wetlands. Native forests and wetlands now cover about 28% of the

region.[34] The rate of land clearance in the Waikato region has slowed and the current greatest threat to native species comes from introduced species such as possums, rats and stoats. These pests have become established in all of our mainland forests, however there are opportunities and existing work programmes to enhance integrated pest management at a regional and local level.

The Waikato region is still home to many native plants and animals, with more than 900 native plants, 124 native bird species, 19 reptiles (including geckos, skinks and tuatara), two species of native bats, two native frogs and many types of fish and invertebrates. Several native species are unique (endemic) to the Waikato region. However, at least 300 species of the region's native species are threatened with extinction.[35]

The Waikato region has more than 16,000 km of rivers and streams, including the mighty Waikato River. Catchment land use affects the water quality of rivers; water quality is good in undeveloped areas, such as the tributary rivers of Lake Taupō and relatively poor in lowland areas that drain intensively developed catchments, for example, lowland Waikato River. Flooding and erosion also have major impacts on waterways, although WRC's river and catchment management activities are designed to minimise these impacts.

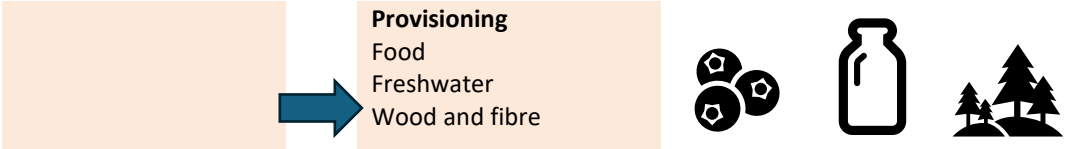
The region's coastal habitats and ecosystems are diverse and highly valued for recreational, commercial, and cultural reasons, however threatened by loss of natural character and biodiversity, and degraded water and sediment quality. The East coast is part of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park that includes Te Whanganui a Hei Marine Reserve and the Firth of Thames RAMSAR site (a wetland of international importance). All of the West coast marine area is covered by the West Coast North Island Marine Mammal Sanctuary.

The Waikato region contains 70% of New Zealand's geothermal systems, however many have been damaged by changing land use and energy generation, and there is increased pressure to develop the areas for more energy or as tourist attractions.

Other key issues for the natural environment in the Waikato region include:

- Declining water quality due to nutrient concentrations.
- Warming climate creating favourable conditions for invasive species that affect indigenous biodiversity.
- Long-term shift required to improve environmental outcomes.
- Lack of knowledge of the efficacy of nature-based solutions.
- Ongoing plant and pest invasions.

There are opportunities, however, to protect, restore or enhance the natural environment, not solely for its intrinsic values but also for its life-supporting capacity and ecosystem services. These opportunities include nature-based solutions, green infrastructure, integrated pest management and mātauranga Māori.



[34] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Land use in the Waikato. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/land-and-soil/land-use-in-the-waikato/

[35] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Our biodiversity. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/biodiversity/our-biodiversity/

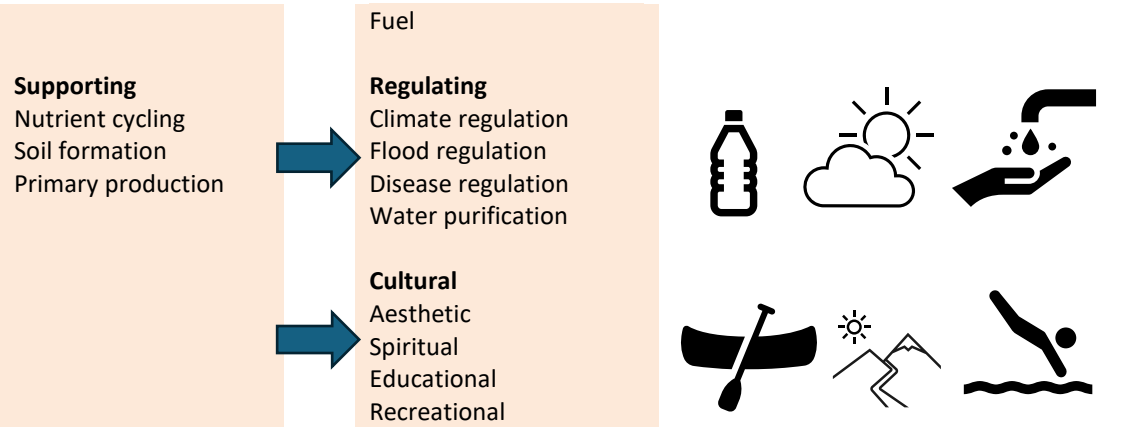


Figure 8: The types of ecosystem services, Adapted from: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005).

The key regional questions relating to the natural environment are:

- What areas need/should be protected, restored or enhanced?
- What connections/patterns/corridors between areas of the natural environment exist and what are the opportunities around these?
- What conflicts exist between other RSS priorities and the natural environment?

5.4 Resilience (climate change and natural hazards)

The Waikato's productive agricultural economy relies heavily on the region's climate, which historically has included plentiful rainfall. However, climate in the Waikato region is changing, and so are the risks the region may face as a result.

Climate change is expected to increase the frequency, severity and impact of many natural hazards in the region. New climate change projections indicate that the region will face higher temperatures, particularly in summer.

Droughts will become more frequent and intense, increasing the risk of water shortages and wildfires, and need for adaptation in farming approaches, including irrigation. Longer dry periods can exacerbate land instability as dry, cracked ground is more prone to failure during intense rainfall. The region has already experienced severe droughts, such as the dry conditions in 2019 and the record-breaking low rainfall in the summer of 2020. Additionally, fewer frost days are expected, which can affect winter recreational activities and tourism, as seen with the record-breaking low snowfall in Tongariro National Park in 2022.

Projections for the Waikato region indicate that the highest fire danger areas are in the Matamata-Piako and Hauraki districts. The area around Te Aroha, particularly the Kaimai-Mamakū forest park, is at risk of extreme fire danger ratings. Climate change is expected to increase fire weather risk in Waikato by about 3% per decade until 2050[36].

Rainfall variability will result in more intense extreme rainfall events and increased flooding, particularly in communities with stormwater infrastructure. Intense rainfall and river flooding drive increased land instability, including landslides and erosion. Landslides are common in steep catchments with weak geology prone to erosion, particularly when soils become oversaturated. The Coromandel Peninsula is highly vulnerable, as seen during Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023, which caused significant road damage. The Hauraki Plains and other low-lying areas, and steep river catchments are also particularly vulnerable to these changes, prone to flooding from heavy rainfall and storms. Flooding associated with proximity to the Waikato

[36] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Climate change hazards and risks in the Waikato region. Draft TR 2024/28. Document # 30901441

River is a hazard risk, and many of the areas that are at risk of flooding are also at risk of liquefaction.

Windy days are expected to decrease, but storm intensity and extreme precipitation will increase, leading to more severe weather events.

Sea level rise will exacerbate coastal inundation and erosion, with extreme sea levels occurring more frequently. Groundwater levels and salinity will be influenced by sea level rise and rainfall patterns, affecting aquifers and increasing saltwater intrusion. Coastal communities, including those on the Coromandel Peninsula and the west coast - Port Waikato, Mokau and Aotea Harbour, will face heightened risks from sea level rise and coastal erosion.

These climate and natural hazard risks have serious implications for infrastructure and assets, and highlight the need for continued investment in flood management and drainage infrastructure. The Waikato region has extensive flood management schemes and land drainage networks, all built to provide agreed levels of service. The flood protection systems managed by Waikato Regional Council protect over 300,000 ha of land and help to realise and protect community infrastructure that generates over $2.2 billion of economic activity annually.[37]

However, with climate change these may be unable to provide the level of protection they used to without considerable additional investment. Ongoing development in flood-protected areas further increases what and who is exposed to flood risk.

The key regional questions relating to resilience (climate change and natural hazards) are:

- What are the climate change patterns and trends occurring in the region?
- What areas are most susceptible to climate change?
- What are the region's opportunities to build a future that is resilient to climate change?
- What other hazards should we be aware of?

5.5 Community connections

The social structures and demographic makeup of the Waikato region are changing. For example, the population is generally ageing and there are growing numbers of young Māori and Pasifika people. There is a need to better understand communities to ensure people have access and are connected opportunities for education, employment, recreation, health and other services.

About 200,000 Waikato people live within towns and rural areas outside the Hamilton, Waipā and Waikato sub-region. However major health facilities, tertiary education and essential social services are concentrated in larger centres such as Hamilton, Thames and Taupō. This means transport needs are high across the region, particularly for those who live rurally, are young or elderly or have a disability. Isolation and inability to participate in society is a key issue that an RSS can seek to address, particularly by considering regional public transport needs and other social infrastructure.

Tourism is a key industry for multiple parts of the region. For example, tourism based around geothermal features is locally important in Taupō and Rotorua-Lakes districts, and prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were approximately 1.4 million visits in the region in 2016[38].

Other key issues for the community connections in the Waikato region include:

- Higher than average rates of social deprivation and the intergenerational social issues that poverty and other associated issues create.

[37] Flood protection - asset management | Waikato Regional Council

[38] Waikato Regional Council 2023. The economy of the Waikato region in 2022. Waikato Regional Council Technical Report 2022/17. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

- Social division, disconnection from community and a growing mistrust in information.

However, there are opportunities for an RSS to ensure communities have affordable access to services, amenities and social life to enhance community connectiveness:

- Broadening the objectives of infrastructure investment to include supporting the wellbeing of people in the region.
- Investment in social amenities.
- Partnering in iwi and Māori community development, using models that reflect Māori world views.
- Enabling mode shift to active transport (such as walking and cycling) or public transport (bus or rail), supported by innovation trends in transport technology.
- Urban intensification and use of green spaces and green corridors in new urban developments.
- Emerging infrastructure in communication, culture and knowledge.
- Partnerships with the creative sector in the Waikato to support inclusive and engaging connections between people and places.

The key regional questions relating to community connections are:

- What are the key places that connect people within the region?
- How do people move between places within the region?
- What and where is the demand for additional community services?

5.6 Culture and heritage

While there are many cultures and ethnic groups who call the Waikato region 'home', this theme is focused on indigenous culture and heritage.

The principal iwi groups in the region are Waikato, Maniapoto, Raukawa, Hauraki, Te Arawa and Tūwharetoa. Within these iwi groups there are numerous hapū (sub-tribe). Iwi are often represented in an official capacity by an iwi authority, iwi trust board or rūnanga.

Iwi throughout the region have expressed a desire to work in various forms of partnership with WRC and other local authorities. Some of these aspirations are embedded via Treaty of Waitangi settlements, whilst others are expressed by memorandum of understanding and other formal and informal relationships. Iwi management plans are a valuable tool to capture mātauranga Māori and provide a framework to articulate cultural values, aspirations and issues. The key issues for iwi in the Waikato region are set out in Appendix 6.

Opportunities exist through RSS development to enhance partnerships with iwi and protect cultural heritage sites that are vulnerable due to development or climate change, including:

- Exploring how Māori world views and mātauranga Māori can support intergenerational and long-term thinking in development, infrastructure planning and natural environment protection.
- Supporting the Māori economy, which is a growing force.
- Enabling iwi leadership in regional issues and governance.
- Supporting the growing Māori population, particularly the younger demographic.

The key regional questions relating to culture and heritage are:

- What areas hold cultural significance to iwi/hapū/Māori?
- Where are key areas of historic heritage in the region?
- What are the key cultural and social values, sites and institutions?
- What conflicts exist between other RSS priorities and cultural and social values?

6 Data inventory / stocktake

This section provides a summary of the information and spatial data collated for this inventory. Many of the technical reports relied on have been discussed earlier in this report and are expanded on below where relevant.

WRC holds a significant amount of spatial and non-spatial information in its internal data catalogue. Most spatial layers used in this inventory have been internally sourced from WRC but ownership of data varies.

There is also a significant amount of data held by WRC that is not necessarily spatial in nature, such as population, household, employment and wellbeing. This type of information is relevant across all themes and will underpin any decisions made in an RSS.

The following sections break down and summarise the information sources and data gathered for each of the regional themes, including an infographic that highlights the key spatial layers and information gathered for each theme and any obvious conflicts. As part of this analysis, some initial conclusions are drawn in terms of how far the current state of information goes to answering the key regional questions, considering overlaps between data layers and significant gaps.

6.1 Overarching demographic and economic information

The Infometrics Regional Economic profile for the Waikato region[39] provides a comparative breakdown of the demographics of the region, based primarily on census data. It also provides information on the economy, labour market, wellbeing, tourism, and the environment, including greenhouse gas emissions, air quality, freshwater quality and land cover. An individual profile for each of the districts in the region is available through Infometrics, except for Matamata-Piako district.

The Waikato Integrated Scenario Explorer (WISE) spatial model is the current main tool used to develop the Waikato demographic, economic and land use projections for the short- and longer-term future to support planning and decision-making by councils, central government agencies and business sectors. WISE is currently being updated to reflect 2023 census data and this is expected for completion in mid-2025. This will include baseline 2023 data and low, medium and high projections for 2023 to 2073, by territorial authority and small area units for:

- Land use - by 25 land use classes
- Population - by gender and age cohorts
- Households – by household type
- Labour force – people aged over 15
- Employment - modified employment counts
- Value added (GDP) - $million.

The land use projections have already been updated and will be available as a spatial layer in WRC's system in the near future.

WISE could be a useful tool to support the development of an RSS, particularly as a modelling tool to simulate spatial allocation of phenomena such as population growth or environmental effects for which spatial data does not currently exist.

WRC measures the region's progress by identifying trends across 32 key economic, environmental and social indicators. These Waikato Progress Indicators (WPI) provide an overall

[39] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region

picture of the wellbeing and quality of life of the Waikato region and its communities. The WPI were most recently updated in 2023 and will be next updated mid-late 2025 when results are published for the most recent Quality of Life Survey. The WPI data is accessible via an interactive dashboard and published in a master datasheet on the WRC website.[40] The WPI reports on a regional level, although some of the indicators are available at a district level. The WPI programme also gathers additional data to support the 32 Key Indicators, related to topics including building activity, employment, regional GDP, education, housing affordability, life satisfaction, perceptions of safety, social connectedness, resource quality, residential expansion onto versatile land and waste. The WPI programme maintains an inventory of national, regional and local indicator datasets that can be referred to for future work in RSS development.

The Waikato Wellbeing Project[41] also includes some wellbeing data by district and locality sourced from the Social Investment Agency.

WRC tracks the region's economic performance through a comparative dashboard[42] that assesses nine key aspects of the economy –

- Population, household, labour force and land use
- Macro economic indicators
- Business vibrancy
- Sector performance
- Workforce diversity
- Māori economy
- Income and support
- Productivity
- Infrastructure
- Resource use efficiency.

The dashboard is updated whenever new data are available so will be a key information input for an RSS.

Te Waka was the Waikato region's Economic Development Agency (EDA) until its disestablishment in mid-2024. A range of reports and surveys are still available and can be drawn on for information on businesses, industry sectors, workforce, technology and innovation. Te Waka also led development on action plans and strategies, including the Waikato and Bay of Plenty Freight Action Plan and the Waikato Labour Market Strategy. A local EDA still exists for Taupo District, named Amplify.

6.2 Information gathered for regional themes

Development and growth information

[40] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Waikato Progress Indicators – Tupuranga Waikato. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/community/waikato-progress-indicators-tupuranga-waikato/

[41] Waikato wellbeing project 2025. Te Ara Poutama – Waikato Wellbeing Knowledge Initiative. https://waikatowellbeingproject-zdbs-1.rocketspark.co.nz/te-ara-poutama/#DISTRICT

[42] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Trends of the Waikato economy. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/regional-growth-and-development/waikato-economy-trends/

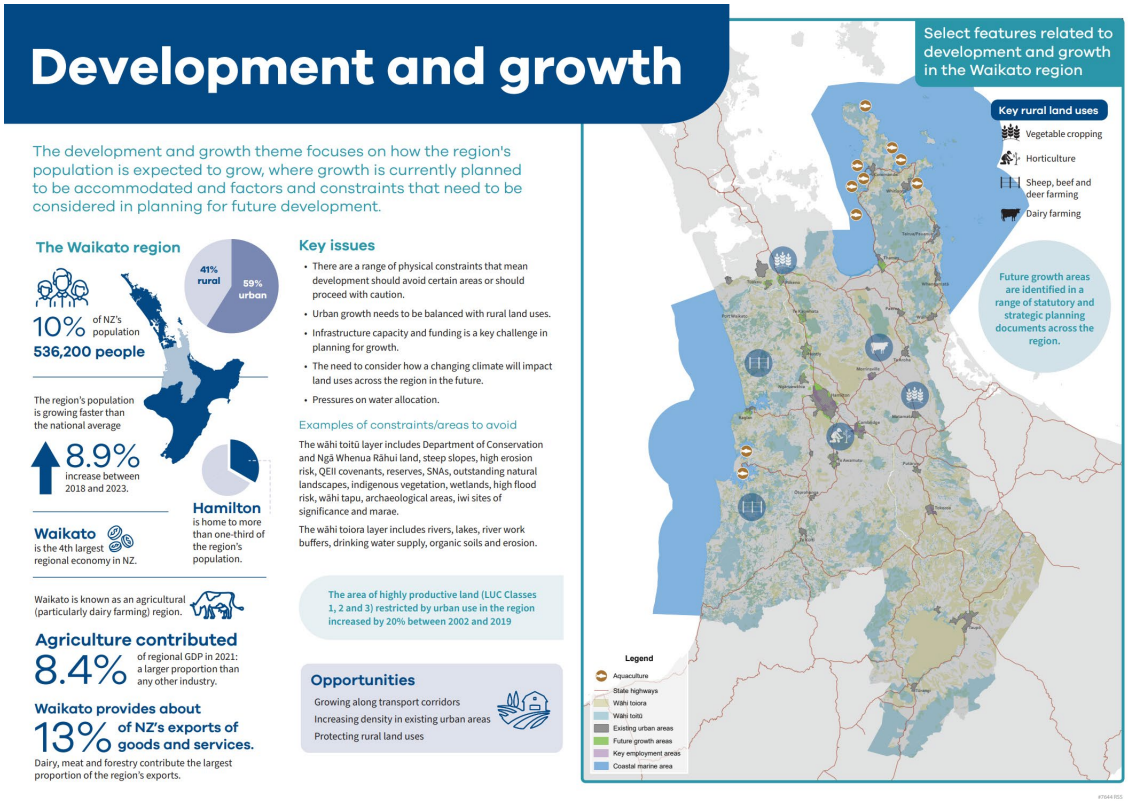


Figure 9: Development and growth theme infographic (Full page version in Appendix 9)

District level and sub-regional growth strategies across the region are a key information input for the development and growth theme identified in this inventory. Each of the territorial authorities in the region have a growth strategy or equivalent plan that sets out the intended direction for growth in the district, including spatial plans and town concept plans, although these contain varying levels of detail. Alongside this, Hamilton City, Waikato, Waipā and Matamata-Piako Districts have the Future Proof Strategy that sets out the intended settlement pattern over 30 years for the sub-region. For the most part, growth strategies are underpinned by urban development demand and capacity assessments, which are required for Tier 1 and 2 local authorities (WRC, HCC, WDC, Waipā DC and RLDC) and recommended for all other local authorities undertaking growth and development planning under the NPS-UD.

Demand and capacity assessments across the region indicate there are areas with insufficient capacity to accommodate future residential and industrial demand for land. However not all districts have undertaken this kind of assessment so the information on this is inconsistent across the region. This information is also generally not presented spatially and so would require further work to translate it into an RSS.

The Future Proof HBA is a comprehensive example of how a demand and capacity assessment can inform future growth planning. The 2023 Housing HBA[43] concludes that over a 30-year period, the Future Proof sub-region has sufficient plan-enabled residential supply to meet demand. However, the HBA highlights that infrastructure constraints, such as water and wastewater capacity, which exist across the sub-region may lead to an insufficiency of supply. If unresolved this has significant implications for the sub-region. In particular, if intensification of existing urban areas cannot be achieved this could undermine the planned public transport network and services.

[43] Fairgray, S 2023. NPS-UD Housing Development Capacity Assessment – Future Proof Partners. Prepared by Market Economics Consulting for Future Proof Partners (Hamilton City Council, Waikato District Council and Waipā District Council), December 2023. https://waikatorc.sharepoint.com/sites/FutureProofAdministration/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FFutureProofAdministration%2FShared%20Documents%2FGeneral%2FFDS%20Special%20Consultative%20Process%2FFINAL%20Residential%20HBA%20%2D%20December%202023%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FFutureProofAdministration%2FShared%20Documents%2FGeneral%2FFDS%20Special%20Consultative%20Process

The 2023 Business HBA[44] overall concludes that the Future Proof Strategy provides for growth in demand for business land and floorspace over the 30-year period 2022-2052. There is potential for some pressure to be felt at the local level within each Future Proof council, as demand for land and floorspace at the town or suburb level may not match exactly the enabled capacity. This pressure is most likely to occur around and/or within the Hamilton city boundary for industrial land. It is possible to reduce these pressures by ensuring that industrial land in "industrial development areas" is protected from encroachment by other uses (especially large format retail).

There are however, issues and limitations identified with HBA estimates including:

- Currency of data (generally based on rating database)
- Crossover between demand for housing and business land in the same space
- Existing but unoccupied developed land is not taken into account
- Rural capacity is not taken into account (focus is on urban development capacity only).

In responding to the direction in the National Policy Statements for urban development and highly productive land, Future Proof commissioned a study to understand the concepts of locality and market in the Future Proof area. This work involved a spatial element, examining where notable commercial and community facilities and organisations are located, how those entities service catchments, and how travel patterns impact how communities function. Localities are not precisely spatially defined, and in some areas they overlap.

WRC collects water allocation data but this is not currently spatially available. It would be useful for an RSS to identify the allocation levels of each catchment, including whether there would still be capacity if all consents in the queue were granted. For example, currently the Waikato river catchment is not fully allocated but the volume in the allocation queue is growing, whereas the Waihou catchment is fully allocated in the primary flow, meaning there is higher pressure and activities are viewed more stringently.

Spatial information identified for the development and growth theme covers current and future growth areas, land limitations and constraints to development, particularly relating to soil constraints, and rural land uses that may conflict with urban growth.

The information shows clear overlap between mapped soil constraints, including highly productive land, acid sulphate soils and peat soils, all tending to be in similar areas, primarily in the areas surrounding Hamilton City. The HAIL layer is unlikely to be an absolute constraint as contaminated sites can generally be remediated and so may not be necessary to include at a regional scale.

The area of highly productive land[45] restricted by urban use in the Waikato increased from about 8,500ha in 2002 to about 10,200ha in 2019, demonstrating that the conflict between the need for development and the need to protect productive land is growing and that the trend is to favour urban growth. This is based on data from the national land fragmentation indicator[46] that is likely to be updated in 2025 following updates to the land cover database in June 2025.

The agricultural layer shows areas of more intensive farming, for example, vegetable cropping tends to be concentrated in the north of the region and east of Hamilton around Matamata. Horticulture farming is prevalent in the area south of Hamilton city, in close proximity to urban areas.

[44] Akehurst G, Ashby H. 2024. Business Development Capacity Assessment 2023 - Future Proof Partners: Hamilton City, Waikato District, Waipā District and Waikato Regional Council. Prepared by Market Economics Consulting for Future Proof Partners, April 2024. https://www.futureproof.org.nz/assets/Future-Proof/Resources/BusinessDevelopmentCapacityReportApril24.pdf

[45] Note 'highly productive land' is currently considered to include Land Use Capability (LUC) Classes 1, 2 and 3, but this is expected to exclude LUC 3 following an upcoming review to the National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land 2022.

[46] Stats NZ 2021. Land fragmentation. https://www.stats.govt.nz/indicators/land-fragmentation/

It is important to note that current mapping only shows planned growth areas identified in district plans, growth strategies and equivalent growth plans. Given these areas are already agreed to be set aside for development, the existing overlaps with constraints are not particularly relevant, but it may assist an RSS in identifying any patterns of conflict so that more informed decisions can be made for future growth.

This layer is also based on information gathered in 2023 for Waikato Regional Policy Statement Proposed Change 2: Highly Productive Land,[47] so it doesn't reflect growth areas recently identified. However each territorial authority has its own up to date mapping for growth areas either as future urban areas zoned in district plans or through growth strategies or equivalent growth documents and will be accessible for the development of an RSS.

There is a lack of housing affordability information across the region. While this is being pursued to some extent through district plan processes, affordable housing provisions are not common across the region and there is debate about the degree this should be addressed at a resource management level. The Waikato Housing Initiative (WHI) dashboard[48] shows housing shortfall and demand at a district level but does not cover the affordability of housing in terms of relative income to house pricing. It would also be useful to overlay any housing affordability data with the social deprivation spatial layer. WHI also published a stocktake report on housing in the Waikato region in 2023[49], covering housing stock estimates, demand (including demand for social housing), and house prices. This report is the first publication in a series of housing related reports, with a subsequent report to focus specifically on regional affordability, which would be particularly useful to inform growth and development in an RSS.

A summary of the key spatial information gathered for the development and growth theme in relation to the key regional questions, including any limitations of the data, is set out in the below tables.

What areas should be avoided for development and urban growth? / land types		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Natural hazards	Refer to Resilience theme	N/A
Peat	WRC - Derived from the New Zealand Soil Classification (NZSC).	WRC has restricted use of this data. Peat depth mapping based on work undertaken in 1978.
Acid sulphate soils	WRC	This layer identifies areas within the Waikato region that have a probability of acid sulphate soil occurrence. Work completed in 2024. Currently only available internally but will be available for external use soon.
Highly productive land	WRC	This layer is based on the work being undertaken by WRC to define highly productive land as required by the NPS-HPL. It includes LUC 1, 2 and 3 class land that has not been identified for future urban use.The NPS-HPL is expected to be updated to remove LUC3 from the definition of highly productive land. This will reduce the area of this data layer.
Waahi Toitu	WRC Waahi Toitu represents areas of 'no-go' for development purposes.	This data layer is a combination of a range of data layers including soil, slope, peat soils, erosion, LUC, and protected areas. Much of the data used to inform

[47] Note that Proposed Change 2 is still in early stages of development and has not yet been consulted on or notified. Work on Proposed Change 2 is paused while WRC awaits further instruction from the Government on the upcoming changes to the National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land 2022. The information contained in this inventory should not be considered as WRC policy direction related to Proposed Change 2.

[48] Waikato Housing Initiative 2025. Housing Data Lake Dashboard. https://www.waikatohousinginitiative.org/housing-data-lake/

[49] Brame L. 2024. Waikato Housing Initiative 2023 Housing Stocktake Update. Prepared by Nifa Limited in collaboration with the Waikato Housing Initiative, June 2024. https://www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz/site_files/36997/upload_files/blog/WHI_UpdatedHousingStocktake_2024(1).pdf?dl=1

		this layer is a regional scale so may not be accurate if zoomed into a property level scale. This is an aggregate layer that cannot be separated into individual attribute layers.
Waahi Toiora	WRC - Waahi Toiora represents areas of 'go-slow' for development purposes. .	This data layer is a combination of a range of data layers including soil, slope, organic soils, erosion, and protected areas Much of the data used to inform this layer is a regional scale so may not be accurate if zoomed into a property level scale. This is an aggregate layer that cannot be separated into individual attribute layers.
Contaminated land	WRC	HAIL register of potentially contaminated sites available internally to WRC only.

Where are the current and future key growth areas?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Future urban areas in district plans and growth strategies	Shows areas identified for future growth in district plans and growth strategies.	Specific boundaries better defined in district plans and some growth strategies than others. Some growth strategies are intended to be updated in the next few years.
NZ Urban Rural Indicator Area	Stats NZ	This layer displays urban areas within the region as densely developed spaces, and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses.
Industrial and commercial hubs / key employment areas	Land use scenario modelled for January 2024 using WISE 1.6 (Waikato Integrated Scenario Explorer). Shows the areas classified as manufacturing or commercial.	Data based on 2018 data. Data layers are derived as 100m grid layers from the WISE model. Refer to WISE technical documentation for Limitation/comments.
Affordable housing	Waikato Housing Initiative	This data is not able to be represented spatially in its current form.
Housing and business development capacity (supply/demand/deficits)	Prepared in accordance with the National Policy Statement on Urban Development.	This data is only available for certain districts – Hamilton City, Waikato District, Waipa District, Matamata-Piako District and South Waikato District. This data is not able to be represented spatially in its current form.
Population projections	*2018-base Population, Family and Household, and Labour Force Projections for the Waikato Region, 2018-2068*, research report commissioned by Waikato Regional Council, Hamilton: University of Waikato.	Current projections are based on 2018 census data and updated in 2022. New projections based on 2023 census are due in September 2025.

What infrastructure may be needed in the future to support development and growth?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Water storage/ security/ supply	N/A	This is a gap to be investigated.
Infrastructure at risk	N/A	This is a gap to be investigated.

		CCEA (Climate Change Exposure Assessment) work that is currently underway may assist.
Change required/ potential change required - transport infrastructure	NZTA Waka Kotahi	These layers indicate the changes that are likely to be required for transport infrastructure over the next 30 years to address a system deficiency relating to travel time reliability, resilience (including climate impacts), and/or safety.
Transport network deficiencies	NZTA Waka Kotahi	This layer identifies parts of the state highway and rail network that experience a significant service deficiency in relation to safety, resilience, or travel time reliability.
Future infrastructure identified in growth or infrastructure strategies	Infrastructure list in the Future Proof Strategy. Territorial authorities' infrastructure strategies. National Infrastructure Pipeline.	This data is not able to be represented spatially in its current form.

Where are the key rural/agricultural areas currently not suitable for urban development?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Key agricultural/ horticultural areas/ land uses	LRI - Suitability of Arable Cropping	This data is based on New Zealand Land Resource Inventory (NZLRI) Land Use Capability (LUC) that rates the ability of land to sustain agricultural production, based on an assessment of NZLRI factors, climate, the effects of past land use, and the potential for erosion. The data in this layer was collected over an extended time period. Mana Whenua are currently refining some data for the Waikato region.
Crop Suitability layers (Land Use Opportunities)	Data Supermarket	Open access data provided by Land Use Opportunities: Whitiwhiti Ora funded by Our Land and Water National Science Challenge. Data sets were created between 2020 and 2023.

Infrastructure information

Available infrastructure information is at widely varying levels of detail across the region. There is a lack of comprehensive infrastructure planning, reporting and analysis at a whole-of-region level, although there is good information available at a project, district and sub-regional level in some cases. For example, HCC has undertaken significant work in developing scenarios to better understand infrastructure capacity and have infrastructure masterplans and investment plans that contain detail on local-scale infrastructure.

This inventory largely covers public and essential infrastructure at a regional or network level. This is because the indication from the government has been that spatial planning is about investment in the right public infrastructure and where public money is being spent. Further information on local pieces of infrastructure is captured in local planning documents prepared by local authorities. Councils are required to incorporate 30-year infrastructure strategies into their LTPs however this will only cover infrastructure assets owned and operated by local government therefore will not provide a complete regional picture. Private infrastructure assets have not been fully captured in this inventory, however it is acknowledged that there may be a need to incorporate this kind of information following engagement with stakeholders and community. For example, private infrastructure which provides significant public benefit or contributes significantly to regional GDP or employment, such as large scale dairy factories may be useful to include in an RSS.

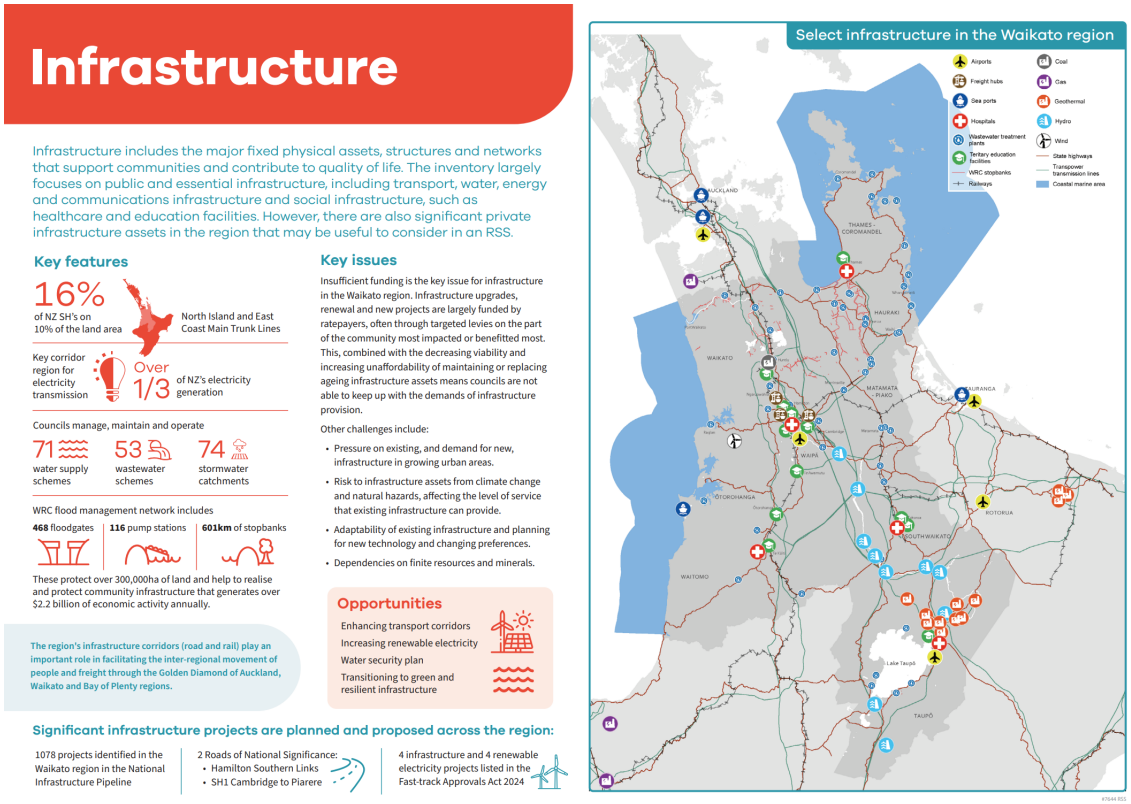


Figure 10: Infrastructure theme infographic (Full page version in Appendix 9)

The WRC 2013 Infrastructure Inventory,[50] while dated, is a useful information source that provides an overview of infrastructure networks within the Waikato Region and between the region and the rest of New Zealand at a regional scale. It also examines funding and expenditure on infrastructure and provides recommendations for a Waikato spatial plan or RSS.

UNISA is currently seeking to improve efficiency of infrastructure planning and investment through the development of a 30-year Inter-Regional Infrastructure Development Plan. The plan will represent the collective interests of the regional, unitary and city councils of the upper North Island and seek to provide a framework for integrated and cohesive development, coordination and prioritisation of infrastructure. This work is not yet complete but there have been a range of studies undertaken by UNISA,[51] particularly in relation to freight, rail and major transport infrastructure, which the plan will rely on and may be useful for an RSS.

The Future Proof Strategy and Implementation Plan[52] identifies future infrastructure improvements, particularly for transport and water. However, there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding timing and funding for critical infrastructure requirements. Future Proof has identified seven transformational moves and key actions to achieve these moves, including additional studies to improve information around infrastructure requirements and future growth, including preparing an integrated spatial framework for north Waipā and south Hamilton and an economic and connectivity spatial concept for the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor.

The Waikato Regional Energy Inventory[53] itemises the known spatial extent of existing and potential energy resources in the region, highlighting the existing regional dominance of hydro, thermal and geothermal electricity generation. The Energy Inventory also addresses the current

[50] Waikato Regional Council 2013. Waikato Infrastructure Inventory – Waikato Spatial Plan. Waikato Mayoral Forum Technical Working Group 2013. Document # 13532401

[51] Hamilton City Council 2025. Upper North Island Strategic Alliance – Publications. https://hamilton.govt.nz/strategies-plans-and-projects/regional-strategies-and-plans/upper-north-island-strategic-alliance/

[52] Future Proof 2024. Implementation Plan. https://www.futureproof.org.nz/assets/Future-Proof/Resources/ImplementationPlan.pdf

[53] Waikato Regional Council 2024. Waikato Regional Energy Inventory. March 2024. Document # 28279632

understanding of demand management, including opportunities for transition to a low emissions economy with electrification and substitution of portable transport fuels. It also identifies a range of gaps to be addressed as part of an upcoming review of the Regional Energy Strategy that is expected to be completed in 2026.

The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority's Regional Energy Transition Accelerator (RETA) programme[54] seeks to develop and share a well-informed and coordinated approach for regional decarbonization, focusing on understanding local opportunities and barriers faced by industry when seeking to reduce emissions from process heat in manufacturing and processing. The RETA report for the Waikato region was published in March 2025[55] and identifies opportunities for large industrial sites to transition to renewable fuel sources. This also includes a spatial component that will be useful information for an RSS.

In late 2024, the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission released a discussion document[56] that outlines the Infrastructure Commission's thinking on what is required for the development of a 30-year National Infrastructure Plan, including the planned investment in infrastructure required over the next decade and the gaps between long-term needs and planned investment. To inform the plan and decision-making across the system, the Infrastructure Commission is working on a national infrastructure pipeline to represent a complete picture of current infrastructure investment activity. The pipeline currently focuses on committed and funded projects but doesn't yet include investment that has been signalled but not confirmed. The pipeline currently includes 1078 projects for the Waikato region across all sectors, of which 771 are funded or part funded. Organisations can also submit business cases to a Priorities Programme that the Infrastructure Commission is compiling to provide a national picture of infrastructure priorities. The Infrastructure Commission Pipeline and Priorities Programme is currently the best reflection of need, however this only includes projects of national or regional significance that provide benefits at a larger scale. It is important that an RSS aligns with the direction of the Infrastructure Strategy, Plan and Pipeline.

Spatial information gathered for this inventory for infrastructure shows the location of existing infrastructure assets across the region, covering transport, water, energy, social and communications infrastructure, and also other infrastructure such as mines and aquaculture.

A summary of the key spatial information gathered for the infrastructure theme in relation to the key regional questions, including any limitations of the data, is set out in the below tables.

What is our key social infrastructure?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Education facilities	Eagle Technology and WRC NZ School Directory NZ Early Childhood Services Directory Tertiary Facilities	N/A
Healthcare facilities	Ministry of Health	Layer that shows the following health facilities: • Hospitals • Aged care facilities • Pharmacies • Enrolling GP practices • Plunket clinics

[54] Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority 2025. Regional Energy Transition Accelerator. https://www.eeca.govt.nz/co-funding-and-support/products/about-reta/

[55] Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority 2025. Regional Energy Transition Accelerator – Waikato – Phase One Report. https://www.eeca.govt.nz/assets/EECA-Resources/Co-funding/RETA-Waikato-Phase-One-Report.pdf

[56] New Zealand Infrastructure Commission 2022. Rautaki Hanganga o Aotearoa – New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2052. https://tewaihanga.govt.nz/the-strategy

		• Ambulance stations
Other communities facilities - libraries, community halls etc.	NationalMap, CoLab, Sport NZ	Layer that shows the following community facilities: • Arts and Culture • Community Centre • Library • Religious • Sports and Fitness • Cemetery • Conference/Events • Memorial • Large Event Facility • I-Site locations • Indoor Courts / Sport Facilities • Outdoor Courts / Sport Facilities • Playgrounds • Sport Club Buildings • Golf Courses • Swimming Pools • Bike Parks
Justice Facilities	Eagle Technology and WRC	Layer that shows the following justice facilities: • Police stations • Courts • Prisons Last updated in 2019.
Other critical social infrastructure	NationalMap	Layer showing civil defence centres and fire stations.

What is our key water infrastructure?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Flood and drainage infrastructure	WRC	Layer shows flood and drainage assets such as embankments, pumpstations, flood gates, land drains.
Three waters infrastructure	WRC	Data is variable across districts and may not contain all the all existing assets.
Dams	WRC	Register of large dams as required by Section 151 of the Building Act 2004.

What is our key transport infrastructure?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Airport	WRC	Included airports and aerodromes in the Waikato Region. Also included major airports outside region i.e. Auckland, Tauranga and Rotorua.
Roads of national significance, regional and arterial road corridors	NZTA Waka Kotahi	The One Network Road Classification is a classification system, which divides New Zealand's roads into six categories based on how busy they are, whether they connect to important destinations, or are the only route available.
Average daily traffic	NZTA Waka Kotahi	Updated monthly so data can quickly get out of date if not refreshed.
Rail	Kiwirail	N/A
Freight ports and hubs	WRC	Created using public information.
Freight flows	NZTA Waka Kotahi	This layer was developed as part of the pan-regional summaries for Arataki 10-

		Year Plan V2 and shows the key freight flows in New Zealand.
EV charging stations	NZTA Waka Kotahi	Maintained by NZTA Waka Kotahi using data supplied by third parties.
Service stations	NationalMap Points of Interest	N/A

What is our key energy infrastructure?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Renewable generation	Various: Canterbury CDEM, Electricity Authority (New Zealand), WRC	Identifies current and proposed renewable energy projects (Geothermal, hydro, rubbish, solar, wind and co-generation).
Non-renewable generation	Various: Canterbury CDEM, Electricity Authority (New Zealand), WRC	Identifies operational power stations using gas or coal.
Waikato Energy Inventory	WRC	Prepared in 2024 to assist with a review and update of the regional energy strategy.
Transmissions lines	Transpower	N/A
Gas transmission lines	FirstGas	Includes the gas transmission network and distribution mains.

What is our key communications infrastructure?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Fibre	Eagle Technology	Data is from 2020.
Cell towers and sites	Various from cell providers	Some data hasn't been updated since 2014.

Any other key infrastructure?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Aggregates/quarries/mines	WorkSafe NZ, New Zealand Petroleum & Minerals (part of MBIE)	Infrastructure Commission has undertaken work to identify areas with potential aggregate resources, however this covers only part of the region.
Aquaculture	WRC	Regional Coastal Plan identifies key aquaculture areas.

Natural environment information

The natural environment theme is based on the features and areas in the natural environment that already are protected to an extent, or that might need protection in the future.

Freshwater bodies including rivers, streams and lakes, and other natural environment features including significant natural areas (SNAs) and native vegetation cover a large amount of the region, except in the area east of Hamilton city, including Matamata-Piako and the Hauraki Plains that are less covered.

The rivers and streams layer clearly shows the pattern of the catchments across the region. Wetland extent is largely concentrated in the northern part of the region, however the layer used for this inventory is considered a 'baseline' layer for additional wetland identification work, as currently required by the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) 2020. Since this layer was developed in mid-2024, additional wetland mapping has been undertaken by WRC in the Waipā catchment and parts of the Middle and Upper Waikato catchments district to the NPS-FM standard but is not yet complete for the whole region.

Regional councils are required to complete detailed mapping to identify wetland extent by the year 2030 under the NPS-FM. At this stage mapping covers 20% part of the region so this layer will need to be updated as more wetlands are identified and mapped.

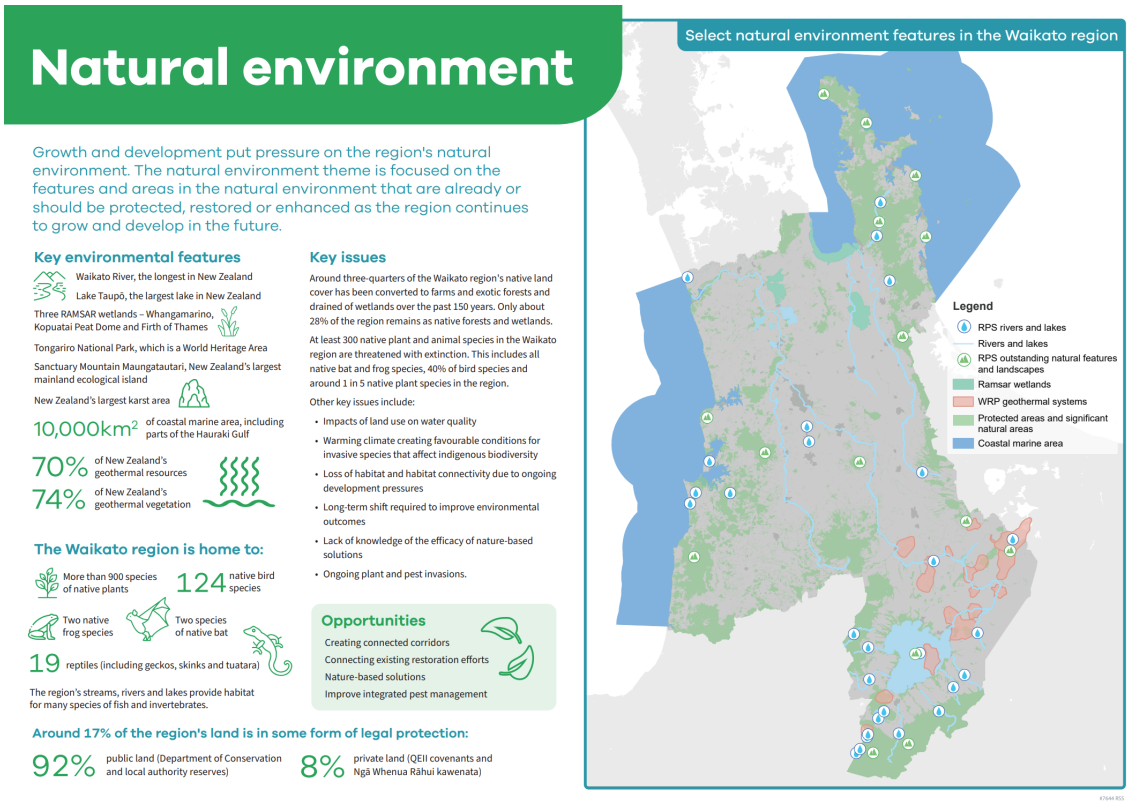


Figure 11: Natural environment theme infographic (Full page version in Appendix 9)

SNAs are concentrated in specific areas across the region, primarily in Waitomo, Hauraki, Waikato and Thames-Coromandel districts. The region has SNAs of international and national significance, determined based on guidelines prepared by WRC[57].

WRC has provisionally identified SNAs through comprehensive district-scale vegetation mapping, on a district-by-district basis, largely relying on spatial data and geographic imagery. This information is shared with territorial authorities who then refine it and undertake additional ground-truthing, validation and engagement with affected landowners prior to including this information into district plans. However, this process differs between districts, and SNA mapping across the region differs in degrees of accuracy and aligns to different degrees with the criteria for SNA identification in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement. Most territorial authorities in the Waikato region have recently updated or undertaken SNA mapping, although some date back to 2007.

The National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (NPS-IB) sets out a criteria that would nationally standardise the process for SNA identification but the Government has indicated that there will be significant changes to the NPS-IB, including the requirements around SNAs that mean many councils are currently not progressing work in this space. Due to this uncertainty, it is unclear whether the current SNA layer is a good representation of SNAs across the region or if there is a lack of mapping in certain areas skewing the picture.

Biodiversity priority site areas may be a useful indication for an RSS in terms of where future investment could be directed towards improving biodiversity outcomes. This layer is based on a zonation analysis undertaken in 2015 that provides a high level indication of priority but many of the sites have not been verified in the field so this needs to be taken into account.

[57] Wildlands Consultants 2023. Updated guidelines for determining areas of significant indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna in the Waikato region. TR 2023/03. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202303.pdf

The protected areas layer that includes QEII and DOC conservation land primarily covers areas in Thames-Coromandel, along the regional boundary with Bay of Plenty and in the southern part of the region.

The bat habitat spatial layers were developed in 2024 by the Waikato Bat Alliance. It identifies three potential layers of landscape-scale protection across Hamilton City, Waikato District, and Waipā Districts with the aim to provide long-term bat habitat protection and opportunities for bat roosts and foraging and commuting habitat connection. The layer was designed to help councils prioritise areas for protection and restoration efforts.

Layer A identifies areas most likely to include bat roosts, incorporating areas of native forest, stands of exotic trees, areas with access to foraging habitat and still water and areas with minimal artificial light or noise. Layer B aims to connect areas with high-quality roost potential from layer A using waterways and tree-covered routes to identify potential corridors that could facilitate bat access. Layer C looks at the broader landscape to indicate possible areas to focus future restoration efforts to strengthen connections between bat habitat layers, taking into account existing restoration work and where there is less known pressure for development. This layer in particular could be useful for an RSS to identify areas where there are opportunities to do work to improve not just bat habitat but achieve wider biodiversity outcomes. This kind of information is also useful to inform conversations with developers about compensation or offsetting opportunities for loss of habitat or indigenous biodiversity and be proactive about consolidating restoration and enhancement efforts in certain areas.

Other habitats for threatened species are mapped and presented as grid-squares to protect the sensitivity of the data by not providing a specific spatial reference for a species. This is also because some of the threatened species information is crowd sourced data so the accuracy and validity of the layer may not be high.

A significant amount of data has been collected for the ongoing Regional Coastal Plan Review, covering the coastal marine area and river mouth boundaries, seascapes, outstanding natural features and character areas, significant indigenous biodiversity areas and water quality. Given this information is still undergoing a formal hearing process it has not been included in this inventory but will be useful to include in an RSS.

Additional environmental monitoring data from WRC is spatially available using Power BI. This includes information on water quality and ecological health that inform whether water bodies are safe for swimming and recreation activities. WRC publishes some of this monitoring information on its website as part of the Waikato Progress Indicators.

The Ministry for the Environment commissioned 43 researchers from NIWA, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, Cawthron Institute and Environet Limited to bring together existing information on 55 environmental attributes. These attributes are in air, terrestrial, soil, freshwater, and estuaries and coastal waters domains. They cover issues as diverse as wetland extent and light pollution. The report[58] is intended to be used by MfE to draw upon when advising on management, policy, and monitoring and could be used by the Waikato region RSS stakeholders in the same context.

Our Land and Water published a data, insights and tools directory[59] for regional councils in 2024 to find information resources relating to water quality, land and land use developed as part of

[58] Lohrer, D., et al. (2024) Information Stocktakes of Fifty-Five Environmental Attributes across Air, Soil, Terrestrial, Freshwater, Estuaries and Coastal Waters Domains. Prepared by NIWA, Manaaki Whenua Landare Research, Cawthron Institute, and Environet Limited for the Ministry for the Environment. NIWA report no. 2024216HN (project MFE24203). https://environment.govt.nz/publications/information-stocktakes-of-fifty-five-environmental-attributes

[59] Our Land and Water 2024. Data, Insights, and Tools Directory for Regional Councils. https://ourlandandwater.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/OurLandandWater_ResearchOverviewforRegional-Councils.pdf

the National Science Challenge. Some of the resources contain spatial information, for example, on water contaminants, water quality and forestry.

A summary of the key spatial information gathered for the natural environment theme in relation to the key regional questions, including any limitations of the data, is set out in the below tables.

What areas do we need/want to protect/restore/enhance?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
SNAs	Territorial Authorities, WRC	Quality of data varies district by district so it may be difficult to analyse at a regional scale.
Wetlands	Waikato wetlands, EM Wetland inventory	The current wetland project ongoing so data is not finalised.
Rivers and lakes	LINZ, WRC	Includes other lake types such as peat, geothermal, karst, dune, and volcanic, but excludes Lake Taupo.
Coastal marine area	WRC	Based on the Regional Coastal Plan that is currently under review.
Ecological/riparian corridors -	WRC, Waikato District, Waipa District, and Hamilton City for bat layers.	Includes bat corridors but data for other species is limited. Further work is required.
Outstanding or high value water bodies	WRC	Includes water bodies identified as high values due to water quality in the RPS. Outstanding water bodies currently being identified through WRC Freshwater Policy Review, due for notification in December 2027.
Conservation land / QEII/Nga Whenua Rahui	DOC, QEII Trust, Nga Whenua Rahui	Identifies sites protected under conservation legislation and other legal protections.
Biodiversity priority areas	WRC	This data layer is intended to provide a high-level view of indigenous biodiversity priorities within the Waikato Region, with an emphasis on identifying sites at a broad scale that will meet Council goals of protecting a representative range of indigenous ecosystems, both terrestrial and aquatic.
Geothermal systems	Regional Plan	Includes ecosystem extents, significant geothermal features, geothermal water features.
Geothermal habitat	This is an inventory of the current distribution, extent, and character of geothermal vegetation in the Waikato Region.	This data was prepared in 2011.
Karst landscapes	WRC	Includes SNA karst caves and surface karst features.
Kahikatea	WRC	Digitised off the 2012 WRAPS aerial photography. Vegetation checking in Google Earth Street View for some of the polygons.
Kauri	WRC	Old growth mature and transitional kauri. Data does not cover the whole of the region.
Outstanding natural features and landscapes (ONFL)	WRC	Includes regional level ONFL. Data needed from district councils for district level ONFL.

Habitats of threatened species	WRC, DOC, iNaturalist, AGOL Living Atlas	Internal only spatial layer due to data constraints, however sources such as iNaturalist are public.

Resilience information

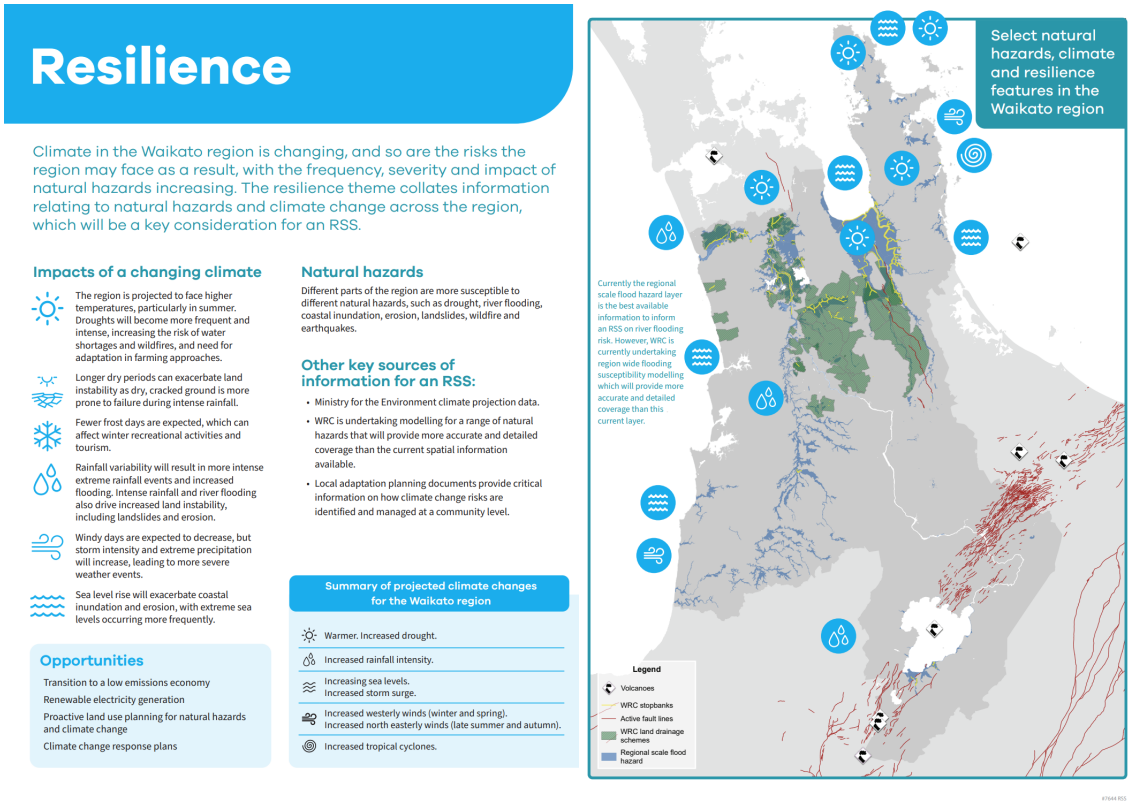


Figure 12: Resilience theme infographic (Full page version in Appendix 9)

A WRC technical report[60] currently, currently in draft form, identifies key hazards across the Waikato region including higher temperatures, drought, extreme weather, flooding, and coastal hazards. The report outlines climate change risks at a regional level and uses spatial examples to highlight where risks are currently known or expected to be present.

The report explains how key hazards may differ spatially across the region, also comparing climate projections and timeframes. For example:

Higher temperature	• Average daily temperature is expected to increase across the whole region, Hamilton City, Ōtorohanga, Rotorua and Taupo Districts are expected to see a significant increase in the number of hot days, particularly by 2090. • Taupo District will see the largest decrease in estimated frost days followed by Rotorua District. • There is a smaller decrease in the number of frost days seen across the northern Waikato Districts.
Drought	• Drought risk is expected to increase across the whole region, but particularly in north-eastern districts.
Increased fire weather	• The highest fire danger in Waikato is projected for the Matamata Piako and Hauraki districts, including Matamata, Morrinsville, Waihi, Thames, Te Aroha, and Paeroa. • Districts identified above that will experience higher temperatures could see an increased fire weather. • However, the Waikato region is not expected to see a significant increase in wind, which is an exacerbator of fire risk.

[60] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Climate change hazards and risks in the Waikato region. Draft TR 2024/28. Document # 30901441

Rainfall variability and flooding	• Overall Rainfall: Projected to decrease in many districts, especially in spring. • Significant Decreases: Notable in Waikato, Thames-Coromandel, Hamilton City, Waipā, Ōtorohanga, Rotorua, and Taupō during spring. • Hauraki and Matamata-Piako: Show significant variability in winter rainfall, with decreases up to 16% and slight increases around 3%. • Taupō District: Largest projected change in rainfall by 2090, with annual rainfall expected to change between -11.4% and 1.0%. Spring rainfall could decrease by -22.4% to -2.8%. • Flooding Risk: Varies across the region, with flood-susceptible areas in all districts. Highly susceptible districts include Waikato, Hauraki, Matamata-Piako, and Coromandel. Taupō District also has flood-susceptible communities, especially in lakeshore areas like Tūrangi.
Extreme weather events (wind & storms)	• Most districts are projected to experience a decrease in the number of windy days by both 2050 and 2090. • Taupo District could experience 13 fewer to 1.2 more windy days, which contrasts with the overall trend of decrease across the region. • North-eastern districts such as Coromandel, Hauraki and Matamata Piako could experience more extreme cyclone activity into the future.
Increased land instability and soil erosion	• The Coromandel Peninsula is highly susceptible to land instability, as well as Northern Waikato surrounding Port Waikato, Wharekawa, Hunua Rangers, and along high country in the wet of the region. • Land instability is also likely surrounding Lake Taupo due to the weaker volcanic ash and pyroclastic flow deposits. • These locations are also susceptible to soil erosion alongside land use areas highly populated by agriculture and horticulture, such as Hauraki Plains, Lower Waikato, Matamata-Piako and Tuakau/Pukekohe.
Sea level rise	• Sea level rise will have long lasting impacts and associated risks across all our coastal districts, including Coromandel, Hauraki, Waikato, Ōtorohanga and Waitomo. • Due to large scale tectonic processes, the Hauraki Plains and Thames foreshore are highly susceptible to vertical land movement (VLM) subsidence. • The Kaiaua coastline is also susceptible to VLM subsidence. • West coast communities such as Raglan, Kawhia and Mokau are also at risk of VLM subsidence.
Groundwater rise and salinity	• The Hauraki Plains is highly vulnerable to the impact of a rising groundwater because of both sea level rise and more intense rainfall and ponding. • Thames is vulnerable to groundwater rise due to vertical land movement. • Increases of saltwater intrusion in aquifers within coastal areas, e.g. Hauraki Plains and Hahei.
Coastal inundation	• The Hauraki Plains is highly exposed to the impacts of coastal inundation; however, the risk is currently mitigated through a foreshore stopbank. • Communities along the Coromandel Peninsula, Wharekawa Coastline, and low-lying West coast communities are all at risk of coastal inundation exacerbated by SLR
Coastal erosion	• West Coast areas such as Port Waikato, Raglan, Mokau, Aotea Harbour are all highly vulnerable to coastal erosion. • Additionally, all eastern coromandel communities are vulnerable to coastal erosion, eroding property, infrastructure and the natural environment, such as Whitianga and Whangamatā.

From this work, it is clear that climate related hazards posing risk vary across the region; some areas are expected to dry out and others are likely to experience more frequent inundation or high deluge rain events. An RSS should aim to show how these risks change over the course of the strategy.

The Ministry for the Environment has published climate projection data[61] that will be a key information source for an RSS. It models climate variables such as temperature, rainfall, and

[61] New Zealand Government 2025. New Zealand Climate Projections Dataset. https://climatedata.environment.govt.nz/

wind rather than hazards themselves, and these can be viewed across different timeframes, seasons and scenarios. Scenario SSP 5-8.5 (high) is yet to be incorporated into the database but this is expected in 2025. There is simply too much data to include in the spatial platform for this inventory and so decisions are required in terms of what scenario(s) and over what timeframe an RSS should focus on. For example, should an RSS focus on the most likely scenario or the worst-case scenario, and should the temporal scale reflect the length of the strategy or the longest timeframe for which data is available?

WRC's current approach to natural hazard modelling planning is to avoid using specific scenarios and timeframes given the difficulties in applying this consistently across the region. Instead, WRC uses an increments approach to modelling, for example, considering degrees of warming, and increments of sea level rise. This approach has several benefits over only modelling a limited set of scenarios:

- When the SSP scenarios change, existing modelling can still be used to apply the new scenarios without significant re-work.
- Increased ability to manage the risk of a particular hazard, with full understanding of the range of impacts and at what point impacts are likely to increase.

For example, in the case of flood modelling, integer modelling by increments helps understanding of what point flood risk changes from a low impact (e.g. two houses are flooded) to an extreme impact (e.g. the whole town is flooded). This approach is consistent with guidance in the Ministry for the Environment's Coastal hazards and climate change guidance[62].

In terms of spatial information, the WRC hazards portal[63] is currently the best publicly available regional scale information on natural hazards, and covers flooding, coastal hazards, earthquakes and landslides, volcanoes and geothermal, liquefaction and emergency management. However, WRC has dedicated significant funding through its LTP to understanding natural hazards across the region and so the information in the hazards portal is currently being updated.

Currently the regional scale flood hazard layer is the best available information to inform an RSS on river flooding risk. However, WRC is currently undertaking region wide flooding susceptibility modelling that will provide more accurate and detailed coverage than the current regional scale flood hazard layer. This is likely to be available in the next two years and will take into account differing scenarios, timeframes and climate change projections. At this point in time, modelling for the Waipā and Waikato catchments and the Hauraki, Waihou and Piako catchments is complete. This updated layer will provide good insight for an RSS in terms of where development would be subject to flood risk.

Additionally, various territorial authorities across the region are undertaking their own flood modelling at a town/local level, many of them in collaboration with or with support from WRC. This type of district-level modelling may be less useful in an RSS at a regional scale but it is useful information for verifying key risk areas identified at a regional level. There are also challenges with using district-level flood modelling because different territorial authorities rely on different scenarios.

WRC is also undertaking regionwide coastal inundation modelling, considering all areas exposed to a 1% AEP now and in the future. This work is also likely to be available in the next couple of years.

Desktop modelling for landslide susceptibility is near completion for the region, identifying areas where landslides are possible at a regional scale, taking into account vegetation and

[62] Ministry for the Environment 2024. Coastal hazards and climate change guidance. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment. https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Coastal-hazards-and-climate-change-guidance-2024-ME-1805.pdf

[63] Waikato Regional Council 2025. Waikato Regional Hazards Portal. https://waikatoregion.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f2b48398f93146e8a5cf0aa3fddce92c

geology. Climate scenarios have not been considered as part of this modelling however. Mountainous areas such as the west coast and Thames-Coromandel district are most likely to be susceptible to landslides.

Additional layers shown on the resilience dashboard for this inventory include forestry – both from the perspective of being an opportunity for climate management and also in terms of the risk forestry activities can pose in an extreme weather event if not managed correctly.

Local adaptation planning documents also provide critical understanding on how climate change risks are identified and managed at a community level. Across the Waikato region, several community adaptation projects are in progress, and these are briefly summarised in Appendix 5 of this report. These projects involve extensive community engagement to understand and plan for current and future risks. In some places, such as the Wharekawa coast, it is considered that current risk is intolerable even without considering climate change projections.

It is important to note that where there is a lack of spatial information on natural hazards, this is not necessarily because there is no risk in that area, it could be because of a lack of study in that area. There have been different levels of studies that have been done across the different catchments in the Waikato region by different councils, some of which are still ongoing and so it should be assumed that resilience information is not complete and will need to be continuously updated as new information comes available.

Existing regional scale information indicates that most of the region is subject to some kind of natural hazard risk; flat areas are at risk of flooding and sloped areas have land instability risks. It will be the role of an RSS to identify the areas least subject to risk and highlight the risks in the areas earmarked for growth and development.

A key regional question identified for the resilience theme is what are our opportunities to build a climate safe future? This question is strongly linked to the opportunities related to transition to a low emissions economy. A lot of the spatial information that would assist in answering this question is spread across the other themes identified in this inventory. For example, renewable energy information is set out under infrastructure, transport information including public transport, active transport modes, and electric vehicles are captured in the infrastructure and community connections themes, and flood and drainage infrastructure sits under infrastructure along with water retention areas and reservoirs. This highlights that information on climate change, particularly, but also natural hazards, sits across all themes and should perhaps form the underlying information for an RSS rather than being analysed separately. Further to this point, the opportunities to build a climate safe future often have multiple interrelated benefits across social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing, e.g. compact urban environments have less transport dependency and therefore less emissions, and people are more active and therefore happier and healthier.

A summary of the key spatial information gathered for the resilience theme in relation to the key regional questions, including any limitations of the data, is set out in the below tables.

What areas are most susceptible to climate change?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Rainfall	NIWA	Total rainfall, Number of rainy days, Number of very rainy days, Heavy rainfall.
Sunshine	NIWA	Shows amount of solar radiation.

Drought	NIWA	Number of hot days, Number of very hot days, Average daily air temperature, Average daily max air temperature, Drought exposure (PED), Number of dry days, Average wind speed, Number of windy days. Several variables available but will need to determine applicable scenarios and parameters. More work required.
Fire weather	NIWA, Climate Prescience, Victoria University	Based on the IPCC AR5 (RCP) projections.
Coastal sensitivity / erosion	NIWA, University of Auckland, WRC, Thames-Coromandel District Council	Various sources that were created for different purposes. More work required.
Sea level rise	NIWA, WRC, Thames-Coromandel District Council	Multiple scenarios available so need clarification on which data to use. More work required.
Erosion	NZLRI	This is a national map that identifies erosion type and severity.
Aggregated GHG emissions	NZTA Waka Kotahi	Emissions for each calendar year are estimated based on the length of the road transport network travelled together with traffic data and expected emissions as predicted by the New Zealand Vehicle Emission Prediction Model.
Flood risk	Regional and local	Data from a range of sources and does not cover all of the region.

What are our opportunities to build a climate-safe future?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Managed retreat	N/A	This is a gap in the data.
Flood and drainage infrastructure	WRC	Identifies areas protected by flood and drainage infrastructure
Forestry	WISE Land use 2024 Modelled (v1.6)	Based on 2018 data.
Opportunities to reduce emissions	No data readily available.	This is a possible gap in the data. EECA may be able to provide data.

What other hazards do we need to be aware of?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Coastal hazards	WRC Hazards Portal	Includes tsunami and storm surge risk.
Earthquakes and landslides	WRC Hazards Portal	Includes fault lines, liquefaction risk, and historical landslides and earthquakes. HCC has more specific liquefaction data for Hamilton city.
Volcanoes and geothermal	WRC Hazards Portal	Includes known features and current alert levels.
Karapiro dam break	WRC Hazards Portal	The dam break map data is the best estimate of inundation levels for a dam break event. Prepared in 2012.
Historic natural disasters	Not yet identified	This is a gap in the data.

Community connections information

This theme is about understanding the key places that connect people within the region and how people move between those places. Spatial information gathered spans transport

infrastructure, including cycling and walking paths and trails, and regional public transport routes, tourism, community facilities, and key employment areas.

While there is a significant amount of overlap with information gathered for the infrastructure theme in terms of community and transport infrastructure, this theme looks at the information with more of a social wellbeing lens, considering essential services and the things that make a community.

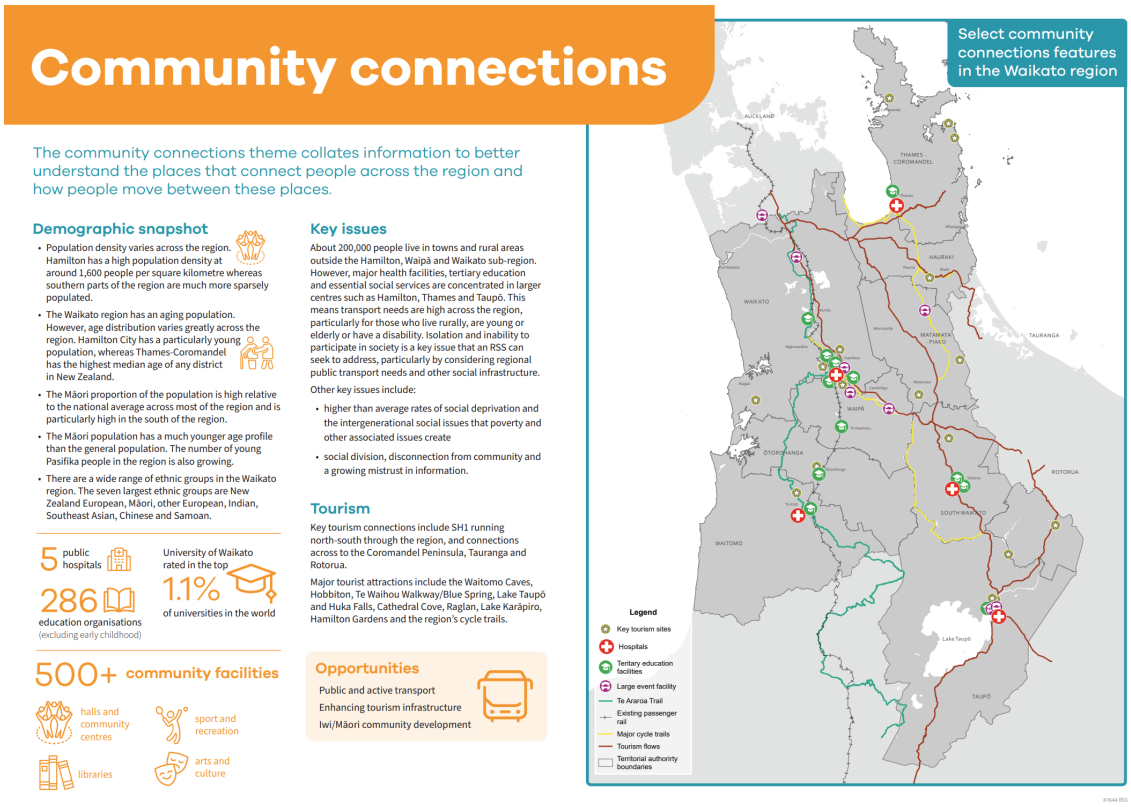


Figure 13: Community connections theme infographic (Full page version in Appendix 9)

The community infrastructure layer shows the spread of community facilities across the region. This layer would be useful to overlay with demographic information to better understand, for example, whether healthcare facilities align with where the population is aging, which can then be used to understand whether there are community transport needs and access issues.

It would also be useful for community facilities to be spatially represented in terms of their community of interest to understand. It is understood that Sport Waikato have already undertaken this kind of work for sport and recreation facilities as part of the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan so this may be able to be accessed for an RSS. In the absence of this analysis, it can be observed that community facilities tend to form a pattern around key transport corridors and within established urban areas.

Key employment areas are depicted in this theme. Future work for an RSS would be to use this information, along with tourist information to understand the key destinations that are important to the regional community, in terms of both where people need to go (i.e., for work) and choose to go (i.e., for recreation). The Future Proof centres hierarchy is an example of this, giving a scale perspective on the relative importance of an area, identifying smaller places that are important for locals and those that draw people from further afield. This may involve primary needs analysis, retail analysis and recreation analysis. It is important for an RSS to identify local towns and villages that provide local amenities and community connections and regionally significant places that bring people together from all parts of the region, and also how these different areas are used and needed.

Tourism is spatially represented by points of known tourist locations across the region. This is not a definitive list as it was created by WRC GIS spatial analysts based on a desktop search. It would be useful for these points to be scaled in terms of visitor numbers and/or regional GDP contributed to better understand the scale of influence of key tourist destinations. A spatial layer developed by Waka Kotahi depicting tourism flows across the region could be used to inform an understanding of tourist hotspots and the transport infrastructure needs to support this. Destination Management Plans prepared by Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO) are also useful to understand tourism patterns, existing work programmes, and where investment is needed in tourism infrastructure. RTOs may also have information on accommodation pressures across the region which may be useful to incorporate into an RSS.
In terms of public transport in the region, district level public transport routes have not been included in the inventory. This level of detail is probably not useful for an RSS but it may be useful for an RSS to consider which districts and towns do not have access to public transport and areas that have good choice in both routes and frequency. District councils have spatial information on public transport that can be brought into an RSS if necessary.

There is limited passenger rail transport in New Zealand, including in the Waikato, with the Te Huia train running between Hamilton and Auckland and the Northern Explorer train operating from Auckland to Wellington, stopping in Hamilton and Ōtorohanga in the Waikato. These lines are shown on the spatial platform, but other rail lines (currently used for freight) are shown as potential opportunities for passenger rail to be extended to other areas through the Waikato region.

Layers showing various authoritative boundaries spanning local government, health, law enforcement, regional tourism organisation areas and recreation boundaries such as Fish and Game have been included in this inventory. This information is useful to understand the different responsibilities of stakeholders in the region and the areas they work within. In some cases, authoritative boundaries align but in many cases they do not. An RSS should consider these differing responsibilities and also whether there are areas in the region that sit within multiple boundaries that do not overlap and whether this create implications for community engagement and sense of place. Not all agency boundaries have been included in this inventory, for example, it doesn't include the coverage of the philanthropic groups Trust Waikato and WEL Energy Trust.

A summary of the key spatial information gathered for the community connections theme in relation to the key regional questions, including any limitations of the data, is set out in the below tables.

What are key places that connect people within our region?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Education facilities	Ministry of Education	Includes all education institution types.
Government agency boundaries	Stats NZ	Health board, community boards, electoral wards, police district boundaries, regional tourism organisation areas.
Healthcare facilities	Ministry of Health	Hospitals, aged care facilities, pharmacies, GPs, Plunket clinics.
Other communities facilities	NationalMap	Arts and Culture, Community Centre, Library, Religious, Sports and Fitness, Cemetery, Conference/Events, Memorial, Large Event Facility.
Marae	WRC	
Fish and game boundaries	DOC, and Fish and Game	DOC recreational hunting permit areas, Fish and Game regions and access points
Tourism sites	WRC (using open source data)	May not be an exhaustive list.

Tourism flows	NZTA Waka Kotahi	This layer was developed as part of the pan-regional summaries for Arataki 10-year plan V2 and shows the key tourism flows around New Zealand.

How do people move between places/across our region?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Cycle paths	NZTA Waka Kotahi	May not include all local cycle paths.
Walking and tramping tracks	DOC	Includes walking and mountain biking tracks, Te Araroa Trail, camp sites and huts.
Intercity bus stops	NZTA Waka Kotahi	The locations were provided as general transit feed specification (GTFS) files by InterCity buses.
Rail network	KiwiRail	Includes railway tracks and rail assets.
Travel/ employment data	2023 census	2023 Census totals by workplace address for the employed census usually resident population count aged 15 years and above by statistical area 2 (SA2) boundaries for the Waikato Region.
Public transport routes and hubs	BUS-IT bus stops and routes	Shows local and regional public transport routes.

Culture and heritage information

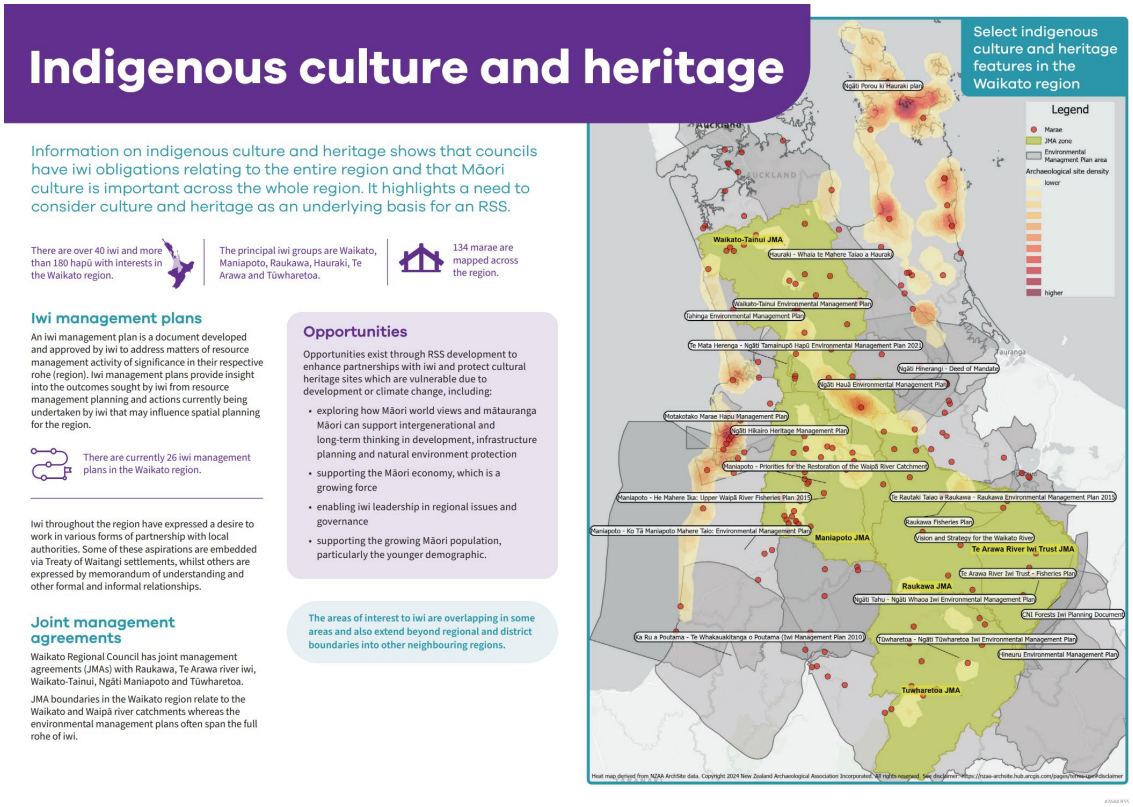


Figure 14: Culture and heritage theme infographic (Full page version in Appendix 9)

The collation of spatial information for culture and heritage identified significant overlaps. The information identified in this theme needs to be considered across all other themes and should form the underlying basis of an RSS.

The areas of interest to iwi are overlapping in some areas and also extend beyond regional and district boundaries into other neighbouring regions. These areas of interest show that councils have iwi obligations relating to the entire region and that Māori culture is important across the whole region.

A key layer for this theme is the spatial representation of areas of iwi interest, based on existing iwi environmental management plans lodged with WRC. It should be noted that the areas identified in this layer are not necessarily aligned with deed of settlement areas or joint management agreement areas. JMA boundaries in the Waikato region are only in relation to the Waikato and Waipā river catchments, whereas the environmental management plans often span the full rohe of iwi.

An RSS should identify key sites of significance to Māori and other culturally important sites (heritage and archaeological), so that these are key considerations in future development and infrastructure planning and can be protected. At this stage, the spatial layer for sites of significance does not visually differentiate between Māori cultural sites and other heritage sites. It is acknowledged that there are possible restrictions about publicly displaying culturally sensitive information. To work around this, it may be appropriate to use a heat map technique to show where significant clusters of sites are at a regional scale. For example, the spatial layer of cultural and heritage sites show a pattern of sites located along the Waikato river and along the coastline.

There are a greater number of land court blocks in the southern part of the region, which does not necessarily align with where high numbers of heritage sites are located. This is possibly reflective of where there is less pressure for growth, thus resulting in less site identification, but may also be reflective of the iwi that are actively going through the land court process.

It cannot be assumed that the information gathered on sites of cultural or historic significance is an exhaustive and exact list. It has largely been informed by the HPTNZ register. Many iwi may choose not to formally identify sites of significance so use of this information must be carefully considered and informed by discussions with iwi.

A summary of the key spatial information gathered for the culture and heritage theme in relation to the key regional questions, including any limitations of the data, is set out in the below tables.

How can we spatially represent areas where WRC have current Treaty Obligations		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Statutory acknowledgement areas	WRC	This layer contains every statutory acknowledgement area for every iwi within the region – enacted through legislation and those pending legislation being passed.
Co-governance/co-managements and similar related redress arrangements	WRC	This layer captures all the different settlement arrangements for co-governance and co-management contained in every Deed of Settlement in both enacted and pending legislation.
Waikato-Tainui Deed of Settlement in Relation to the Waikato River (17 December 2009).	WRC	Sites of significance, co-managed land and managed land identified in the Schedule to Waikato-Tainui Deed of Settlement in Relation to the Waikato River.
Iwi and hapū Environmental Management Plan (EMP) Area of Interest (AOI)	WRC	Spatial representation of the areas of iwi interests where iwi have an existing EMP with WRC.
Iwi Joint Management Agreement (JMA) Zones	WRC	The areas defined here are those represented in the signed JMA documents.

Sites of significance to Māori?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Marae	WRC	Shows the location of marae across the region.

Papakāinga - Maori Land Blocks	Te Puni KōKiri	Māori Customary, Māori Freehold and Aggregated Lands within Waikato Region. Dataset last updated in 2017.

What are our areas of historic heritage?		
Data type	**Source**	**Limitation/comments**
Archaeological Sites	New Zealand Archaeological Association	Currently we are not able to present this information publicly
NZHPT Heritage Register (The List) sites	Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga	Currently we are not able to present this information publicly

6.3 Information gaps prioritisation

This inventory proposes a prioritisation criteria to rank the missing information and data gaps in terms of their feasibility and necessity to fulfil to support an RSS. This ranking then informs the key recommendations from this inventory for the next phase of RSS development in terms of further information collection.

Overall limitations of information gathered that contribute to the information gaps include:

- The level of detail of data and spatial information across the region often varies by district.
- The outdatedness of data and spatial information across the region also often varies by district.
- There are restrictions around use of and publicity of multiple spatial layers.

The below table sets out gaps identified in the themes analysis above and also some additional gaps and their ranked priority. This is mostly in terms of gaps in spatial information, however additional gaps identified from key policies and strategies are also included.

The criteria used to prioritise gaps to form recommendations for future work are:

- Importance in terms of necessity to answer a key regional question.
- Ease of sourcing or commissioning the information.
- Ability to fill gap in time to inform an RSS.
- Likely costs, including resourcing.

The ranking of criteria is indicated by colour:

- High (or low in terms of cost)
- Medium
- Low (or high in terms of cost)
- Unknown or N/A

A gap that scores ‘high’ across two or more criteria is considered overall a high priority for additional work.

Theme	Gap	Priority ranking criteria				Overall priority
		Importance	Ease	Timing	Cost	
Demographics and economics	Demographic information is currently being updated to reflect 2023 census data.					
	Comment: WISE scenarios and Waikato Progress Indicators work due to be updated by mid-2025.					

Theme	Gap	Priority ranking criteria				Overall priority
		Importance	Ease	Timing	Cost	
	Limited information on social inequity.					
	Comment: Consultation with organisations such as the Ministry for Social Development would be useful to better understand social deprivation data and how it can be used.					
Development and growth	Mapping of future growth areas only shows planned growth areas identified in district plans, growth strategies and equivalent growth plans and the layer is not up to date.					
	Comment: Territorial authorities will have the most up to date information available for their district.					
	Highly productive land information is currently being updated through RPS Change 2 and so current information may be inaccurate.					
	Comment: The HPL spatial layer will be updated through RPS Change 2 and so does not need to be commissioned through an RSS.					
	Limited information is available on how much of the region's land use and production is for domestic use versus exported (to other regions or internationally).					
	Comment: An RSS needs to understand what is essential for our region to be resilient and self-sufficient; e.g. what is the value of the land and how is it used to feed ourselves as well as providing for the national and international economy.					
	Lack of information on housing affordability.					
	Comment: The Waikato Housing Initiative is doing some work on this so may not need to be commissioned through an RSS. Consider the relationship that housing affordability has with social deprivation.					
	Housing and business capacity data is not available across all districts and this information is also not generally presented spatially.					
	Comment: Future Proof's Market and Locality study is a useful example of how housing and business data can be spatial translated. Most territorial authorities in the region are likely to have some housing and business capacity data from their growth strategies or equivalent plans that can be relied on.					
	Water allocation information is not currently presented spatially.					
	Comment: WRC holds water allocation data and may be able to show this spatially in terms of allocation remaining in each catchment.					
	There is a lack of information on water storage and security.					
	Comment:					

Theme	Gap	Priority ranking criteria				Overall priority
		Importance	Ease	Timing	Cost	
	Some councils may have information on this.					
	There is a lack of information of risk to existing infrastructure.					
	Comment: Climate Change Exposure Assessment may assist with this.					
	There is a lack of information on naturally occurring contaminants in soil.					
	Comment: This information is less necessary at a regional scale.					
Infrastructure	Current spatial information does not communicate the circle of influence in terms of value or scale of areas that are serviced by each infrastructure asset. E.g. a playground that services a small local community versus a larger one that is more of a regional destination facility.					
	Comment: Some territorial authorities are likely to have this kind of information available, e.g. for three waters assets and parks. Information on healthcare, education and justice facilities is also likely available.					
	No spatial information on the capacity or state of infrastructure, including whether upgrades, maintenance, renewal or retirement is planned or needed.					
	Comment: This kind of information is needed to answer the question around future needs for infrastructure. Some territorial authorities are likely to have this kind of information available, e.g. HCC reports on water asset capacity.					
	Lack of information on communications infrastructure. Information on cell sites and cell towers is available but likely out of date.					
	Comment: This information is less important for an RSS.					
Natural environment	Spatial information for wetlands is still a work in progress. Current spatial information is a baseline layer for further wetland identification as required under the NPS-FM.					
	Comment: WRC is progressing wetland mapping in line with the NPS-FM requirements but this is not likely to be finished for the whole region until at least 2030.					
	SNA mapping across the region differs in both process, accuracy and recentness.					
	Comment:					

Theme	Gap	Priority ranking criteria				Overall priority
		Importance	Ease	Timing	Cost	
	Additional SNA mapping is on pause under the NPS-IB so an RSS will need to progress with the current state of SNA information.					
	The vegetation cover layer only includes kauri forest, kahikatea and geothermal habitat.					
	Comment: Unclear if additional vegetation cover information is held by territorial authorities or DOC. SNA layer may be useful enough at a regional level to indicate key areas of biodiversity and vegetation.					
	Biosecurity information has not been included in this inventory.					
	Comment: Ranking for ease is based on ability to source information, however there are some restrictions on use of some biosecurity information that may impact the ease of its use. Regional biosecurity spatial information is included in the regional pest management plan but this was not available in a suitable format to be included in this inventory at this time. UNISA is currently collaborating on an inter-regional pest management plan and pathway for marine pests which could be referred to also.					
	The outstanding natural features and landscapes (ONFL) layer only covers areas identified in the Regional Policy Statement, however territorial authorities also map ONFLs in their district plans.					
	Comment: This information is less necessary at a regional scale.					
	The bat habitat layer only covers districts that are part of the Waikato Bat Alliance – Waikato, Waipā and Hamilton City.					
	Comment: An RSS is unlikely to focus on specific species so this information may be less necessary for an RSS. However, it may be useful to extend this layer over the region to identify areas of opportunity for improving bat habitat that would have wider biodiversity outcomes for other species. Some bat data is available through DOC that could be included but shows individual bat sightings or roosts rather than corridors or larger habitat areas. This may be the type of work undertaken as part of a Regional Biodiversity Strategy instead of an RSS.					
Resilience	Climate change variable data from MFE has not been included in this inventory. There is a large amount of information available but decisions need to be made in terms of how it could be used before choosing specific variables, scenarios and timeframes.					
	Comment: Decisions are required in terms of what scenario(s) and over what timeframe an RSS should focus on.					
	Available coastal hazard information is very detailed and often site-specific so is					

Theme	Gap	Priority ranking criteria				Overall priority
		Importance	Ease	Timing	Cost	
	possibly less useful at a regional scale.					
	Comment: This information is less necessary at a regional scale.					
	There is little to no information on historic natural disasters, which may be useful to understand whether events have been random or if there is a pattern to be aware of.					
	Comment: There is likely sufficient information on natural hazard risk so historic information is less necessary.					
	There is a lack of spatial information on coastal erosion across the region.					
	Comment: WRC is not currently doing additional mapping work to identify coastal erosion hazard areas but this information is likely available through existing coastal adaptation plans.					
Community connections	With community facilities being contained in a single layer, is it difficult to gauge whether there are gaps of certain types of facilities in certain areas.					
	Comment: The 'circle of influence' work noted as a gap under the infrastructure theme would assist in filling this gap.					
	Unclear what the condition of a facility is and whether it is sufficiently serving the community.					
	Comment: Some territorial authorities are likely to have this kind of information available, e.g. for three waters assets and parks. Information on healthcare, education and justice facilities is also likely available. This kind of information is important for an RSS for facilities that serve the regional community but less so for smaller local facilities.					
	Territorial authority public transport routes and information are not included.					
	Comment: This information is less necessary at a regional scale.					
	Tourism sites are not spatially represented by scale (in terms of visitor numbers or GDP) and there may be some missing.					
	Comment: Unknown whether this type of information is readily available.					
	It is not clear from the key tourist destinations where people of the region are visiting versus people from outside of the region and international visitors.					
	Comment:					

Theme	Gap	Priority ranking criteria				Overall priority
		Importance	Ease	Timing	Cost	
	There may be some information through NZTA on tourism flows available that may provide insight into where people are travelling from. This information underpins Arataki and should be publicly available.					
	The cycling and walking path/trail layers are incomplete, currently only showing DOC trails.					
	Comment: Additional information likely available through WRC regional cycling programme business case.					
	Identify key recreational areas – e.g. areas that attract fishing, community sport, etc, and whether those areas have the related infrastructure.					
	Comment: Sport Waikato and other organisations e.g. Fish and Game may have spatial information on key recreational areas.					
Culture and heritage	Spatial layer for sites of significance does not visually differentiate between Māori cultural sites and other heritage sites.					
	Comment: May be restriction issues around publicly identifying specific locations of cultural heritage sites.					
	Cultural and heritage sites layer has not been confirmed by iwi so may not be fully accurate.					
	Comment: Layer has largely been informed by the HPTNZ register. Many iwi may choose not to formally identify sites of significance so use of this information must be carefully considered and informed by discussions with iwi.					

7 Recommendations for the next phase of RSS development

7.1 Further information gathering

This inventory identifies the current state of information held or accessed by WRC. As identified above in section 6.3 there are gaps where it is known there is more information but WRC currently does not have access to it and areas where it is known that there is not any information. This means that during the next phase of RSS development there are options to consider in terms of further information gathering. This inventory does not make any decisions on such options in absence of other key stakeholders who need to be involved in developing an RSS for the Waikato region, but does propose recommendations to fill identified gaps as set out below. Some of these recommendations are considered "quick wins" where it is known that supporting information already exists and just requires further analysis. The recommendations are in line with the overall priority ranking and directly linked to the key regional issues, opportunities, themes and questions identified throughout this inventory, as well as the identified purpose of spatial planning.

Recommendations of highest priority:

- The current and future growth areas layer will require regular updates throughout the development of an RSS given this is an active space and new private plan changes, council-initiated plan changes and fast-track proposals frequently arise.
- Map regional network capacity to identify areas that are subject to water and wastewater constraints. Watercare have recently undertaken this kind of work for Auckland to highlight where new housing developments may not be able to immediately go ahead[64].
- Translate housing and business development capacity assessments into spatial layers.
- Translate water allocation information into spatial layers.
- Two of the key factors that influence the level of investment in infrastructure are population and economic growth rates. It would be useful for the demographic and economic information gathered as part of this inventory to be represented spatially to demonstrate when and where infrastructure investment is needed.
- Investigate availability of information on circle of influence of infrastructure, including capacity where relevant. Territorial authorities may have this kind of information for more significant assets, particularly where designations exist. In terms of recreational facilities, Sport Waikato or Sport NZ might have some information. Where information does not exist, it can perhaps be inferred that the circle of influence is small. This kind of information would increase understanding of where infrastructure or facilities are lacking and where people have to travel further to meet their needs. For example, whether healthcare facilities align with where the population is aging, which can then be used to understand whether there are community transport needs and access issues.
- Show temporal life cycle of infrastructure by incorporating scenarios. Future Proof previously did some work on this in relation to water infrastructure to determine capacity and compliance. It would be useful for an RSS to identify when infrastructure will reach its limits and whether councils have budgeted for this, and also assist in decisions around timing for retiring assets.
- Layer information from council infrastructure plans with LTP investments. This would really help answer the key question of where has growth been planned and whether this intersects with infrastructure investments.
- Update regional socio-economic profile and infrastructure inventory.
- Engage with iwi on cultural and heritage sites information to determine best approach for its use.
- Assess whether existing data and spatial information requires updating. Section 6.2 of this inventory identifies limitations of information collated, a key issue across the board is that information is dated and so potentially inaccurate.

Additional recommendations of lesser priority:

- Assess regional self-sufficiency and resilience in regards to value of land used to provide food for the region versus the value provided to other regions, the national economy or internationally.
- Overlay social deprivation layer with community facilities to understand if there is a connection and whether lack of access to facilities contribute to social deprivation. Also connect with housing affordability information when available.
- Investigate whether further information on communications infrastructure is available. It would be useful for an RSS to assess whether people across the region have equal access and opportunities for communication.
- Support investigations into coastal shipping, "a blue highway" as a viable transport alternative into and around region, particularly around Thames-Coromandel.
- Identify key biosecurity risk areas and existing biosecurity programme and pest management areas, particularly where these intersect or are located near growth areas

[64] Preston N. 2024. Watercare 'blindsides' Auckland developers - 'people will go under'. OneRoof NZ, 17 December 2024. https://www.oneroof.co.nz/news/watercare-blindsides-auckland-developers-people-will-go-under-46798

or infrastructure projects. For example, it would be useful to understand where biosecurity threats like alligator weed exist so that development can be avoided in these areas. An RSS may also be a useful tool to inform and direct biosecurity efforts into controlling pests where it might impact the community or future growth.

- Extend the bat habitat layer across the whole region, basing this off DOC national bat data. Also investigate other fauna species' habitats and whether corridors can be identified across the region. It may be that this work is undertaken as part of a Regional Biodiversity Strategy, which is a requirement for regional councils under the NPS-IB. Identification of highly mobile fauna areas is part of this requirement.
- Identify existing areas where biodiversity restoration, enhancement, compensation or offsetting activities are occurring to incorporate into an RSS. This should enable more effective planning by avoiding piecemeal efforts and encouraging more concentrated conservation planning that can have broader biodiversity outcomes.
- Collate district-level hazard information to better understand the relevance of site-specific hazard information at a regional scale.
- Combine employment information, along with tourist information to understand the key destinations that are important to the regional community, in terms of both where people need to go (i.e., for work) and choose to go (i.e., for recreation).
- Identify the scale of tourist locations in terms of visitor numbers and/or regional GDP contributed to better understand the scale of influence of key tourist destinations.
- Consider which districts and towns do not have access to public transport and areas that have good choice in both routes and frequency. District councils have spatial information on public transport that can be brought into an RSS if necessary.

Existing and ongoing work programmes identified in this inventory that should be incorporated into an RSS to fill identified gaps relate to:

- WISE scenarios for land use, population, households, labour force, employment and value added (GDP)
- Waikato Progress Indicators
- Highly productive land mapping
- Housing affordability
- Infrastructure capacity assessments
- UNISA infrastructure development plan
- RETA report
- Regional Water council-controlled organisations might be able to provide useful region-scale waters information in the future.
- Regional Coastal Plan
- Wetland mapping
- Outstanding water bodies identification
- Region wide hazard susceptibility modelling for flooding, coastal inundation and landslides.

7.2 Data management

This inventory is a snapshot in time of information that may inform an RSS. In order for the inventory to be useful going forward in the next phase of RSS development it is vital for the information to be kept up to date.

The intention for the spatial platform developed as part of this inventory is for it to be made publicly accessible as an interactive portal that shows the relationship between themes and different data layers, and is able to be updated so that RSS stakeholders can be responsive to changing information over the course of the strategy development and beyond. Territorial authorities, iwi and other stakeholders will need to be involved in validating information collated for this inventory and determining an approach for using restricted data.

WRC is currently undertaking an update to its Enterprise Data Strategy to enhance decision making, collaboration and innovation through improve data management. Key objectives of this work include:

- Uplifting data maturity with increased standardisation
- Modernising the data landscape; and
- Enabling strategic data products.

The benefits of this work for RSS development are:

- Ensured data quality, consistency and reliability.
- Improved efficiency by minimising duplicate data collection efforts.
- Facilitation of collaboration and acceleration of innovation by making data readily available.
- Enhanced decision-making by leveraging data insights.

This may involve investing in modern data platforms to support spatial planning and will ultimately make data accessible and shareable, which will be important for ongoing collaboration with RSS stakeholders and the community.

A WRC technical report[65] prepared in 2023 evaluates suitable modelling tools to assist the implementation of an RSS, particularly in regards to the existing WISE model. It identifies the following key disciplines required for incorporation in a modelling framework to inform the development of an RSS:

- Ability to incorporate different spatial scales (local-regional-national) as well as cross-scale interactions.
- Ability to address both the urban and the rural context as well as peri-urban processes. This requires a set of various urban and rural land use types to be included.
- Ability to address urban development capacity, densification strategies, housing affordability and residential choice.
- Incorporation of socio-economic processes, in particular demographic and macro-economic growth and implications thereof.
- Ability to address different types of behaviour or assess the impacts of interventions of different societal groups.
- The ability to include land use – transport interactions, both the impact of the land use on transport demand, intensity, and congestion as well as the impact of transport on land use change processes, in particular new urban development.
- Impacts of climate change and socio-economic development (population growth, economic growth, urbanisation, agricultural intensification) on the environment and ecosystem services.
- Assessment of dynamic disaster risk profiles as a combination of hazard, exposure and vulnerability, and the changes across those over time, including the impacts of risk reduction options.
- Coordination of land use and infrastructure planning to leverage growth and achieve greater efficiencies.

Existing relevant strategies, plans and policies at a regional and local level will need be integrated and synthesised into an RSS to ensure there is a cohesive and comprehensive regional approach. This will support work programmes such as that set out in the Waikato regional deal proposal and other workstreams of councils and other stakeholders identified in this inventory, crossing all themes.

[65] van Delden H, Cardwell R, McDonald G. 2023. A review of spatial planning models. TR 2023/10 https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202310.pdf

7.3 RSS framework and strategy development

The next step in preparing an RSS for the Waikato region is to develop a framework that sets out how partners will work together to prepare an RSS, covering timing and resourcing and a collective vision for the region. A project plan for this work is already underway. As part of this discussion, partners will need to consider the role of an RSS and the level of detail it should cover. The information collated for this inventory is mostly set at a regional level, but there may be some topics or issues where additional information at a local level will be useful. It will be important to find a balance as not to replicate or replace local level strategies, plans and policies whilst still containing a level of detail useful to inform local decision making.

An RSS needs to bring partners together, from local government, central government, iwi, community and other stakeholders, to see beyond territorial and administrative boundaries and work together to manage collective issues and seek joint opportunities for development and growth, infrastructure and the natural environment, whilst enhancing regional resilience, community connections and culture and heritage.

This inventory has identified a range of potential opportunities and issues that an RSS should address and require further consideration during strategy development.

In terms of development and growth, an RSS should show urban and rural land use conflicts, including whether the pattern for urban growth is undercutting productive land that is beneficial to the regional and national economy. An RSS needs to set a direction for the region in terms of how much productive land the region can afford to remove from productive land use and show where development is proposed in areas with significant constraints, including infrastructure capacity and water allocation as well as environmental factors.

An RSS needs to identify infrastructure needs associated with development and growth, and conversely, whether there are housing requirements in areas where existing significant infrastructure projects are underway. It is also important that an RSS takes into account the mechanisms available for funding infrastructure.

It will be important to consider climate change information in relation to future growth and to understand whether the planned land use pattern is resilient to different climate futures. RSS partners will need to decide on an approach for incorporating natural hazard and climate change modelling. WRC's current work in natural hazard modelling takes an incremental approach to consider how climate variables translate to the different scenarios across different timeframes, which means it will be applicable across a range of possible climate futures.

Possible governance arrangements

While the focus of this inventory is on data collation, in considering next steps it is prudent to address possible governance arrangements for an RSS in the Waikato to inform the development of an RSS framework and strategy.

The Waikato region has a long and effective history of working collaboratively with central government to achieve significant outcomes. Through this it has become clear that in a region as diverse as the Waikato there is no single governance model that can effectively manage the wide range of issues at hand. The local authorities of the region have worked closely with the government and iwi partners to adjust and refine regional governance structures to focus on specific issues, and as such there are a range of different partnering structures to address specific challenges that are generally sub-regional in nature.

The Future Proof partnership, which integrates long-term planning for growth, transport and three waters investment under a single governance model, is a key example of a well-established and effective model for delivery. It operates with a dedicated Programme

Management Office and a robust governance framework, ensuring clear oversight, accountability, and coordination across projects and partners. The Department of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Ministry of Transport, Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Education, New Zealand Transport Agency, Kāinga Ora, and Health NZ are Future Proof members in the organisational governance and management structure.

Future Proof includes active participation from iwi groups with representative of Waikato Tainui, the Tainui Waka Alliance and Ngā Karu Atua o te Waka (an advisory group open to membership from all marae in the Future Proof subregion) as well as a seat for representatives of Auckland's Mana Whenua Kaitiaki Forum (in relation to the Hamilton-Auckland corridor). This ensures iwi perspectives and aspirations are embedded in decision-making and project delivery.

Via Developer Forums and economic development teams, the Future Proof partners each work collaboratively with the private sector to understand their needs and factor those into decision making. Most recently, with the introduction of Fast Track consenting, the partners have combined their resources via Future Proof to work proactively with developers that are accelerating release of new greenfield areas ahead of the council partners' planned and funded programmes, so that partners can collectively respond to their applications when they are formally lodged with the EPA.

All local government partnerships are aligned under the auspices of the Triennial Agreement and the Waikato Mayoral Forum. This adaptability and flexibility has allowed the region to focus on the critical issues of the day with the right organisations in the room to resolve local issues. As such, the Waikato Mayoral Forum has been an effective group for a number of years – managing the balance between retaining autonomy for each local authority to focus on the needs of its community and the need to work collectively on priority matters as they arise. The Forum uses the triennial agreement to confirm priorities and establish sub-regional governance structures for specific projects where collaborative cross agency work is necessary to deliver outcomes for the region as a whole. The Mayoral Forum has recently started meeting regularly with the Chairs of the six major iwi in the region (Pare Hauraki, Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Raukawa, Te Arawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa) to resolve issues and discuss priorities.

Another past example is the now disestablished Waikato Plan Leadership Group. The Leadership Group was a joint committee comprised of 15 members (local government (elected members), tāngata whenua representatives, independent non local government members (representing business and the community)), and three non-voting members (government agencies). An independent review[66] of the Waikato Plan was carried out in June 2018 and found that:

- The Waikato Plan provided a valuable evidence base, set a vision for the development of the region and identified a range of actions that, if implemented, could help to achieve the vision for the Waikato. However, the region was unable to translate the Waikato Plan priorities into implementable projects with the resources necessary to be successful.
- The lack of progress on implementation and uncertainty and lack of shared vision regarding the role and purpose of the Leadership Group meant that the whole initiative was at risk of failing to make the transition between plan making and plan implementation.

Ultimately the joint committee was wound up. Some initiatives continued under the banner of other organisations such as the Waikato Housing Initiative but the remainder are no longer being progressed jointly under the Waikato Plan umbrella.

[66] McGredy Winder & Co 2018, Review of the Waikato's 4 Well-Beings Implementation Structures and Processes 2018

Other whole-of-region governance structures are already in place that could be utilised or drawn from for an RSS, including the Regional Transport Committee and the various transport working groups and the SH3 Working Group that sit under its auspices, and the Waikato CDEM Joint committee.

While an RSS is likely to require its own governance structure, there is opportunity to optimise and strengthen existing partnerships to delivery an integrated approach to ensure delivery of outcomes.

8 Conclusion

This inventory establishes an evidence base for spatial planning in the Waikato region. It provides an understanding of what is and starts to question what could be. The inventory enables the Waikato region to progress the development of an RSS and respond in a coherent and robust manner to any forthcoming central government initiatives relating to spatial planning.

An RSS should bring together the local authorities, central government agencies, iwi and other stakeholders to work together and see beyond district boundaries and in some cases, beyond localised priorities. An RSS will not negate the value of smaller scale planning documents and strategies, including growth strategies, which at this point in time are still mandated for some councils.

A cabinet paper on the Going for Housing Growth Programme[67] identified spatial planning as the remaining key to delivery of growth targets and infrastructure planning. The key value of an RSS will be its take on broader issues and opportunities such as environmental limits, transport, integrated catchment planning, highly productive land, etc; the things that are relied on for local growth and infrastructure planning but are best understood at a larger scale.

This inventory sets out a range of key regional questions under six themes. An RSS should be used as a tool to visualise these questions and create a coherent picture for future investment. This will assist in implementing an integrated settlement pattern, providing a long-term view of land use and growth that is coordinated, enabling and aligns with infrastructure and funding and economic development goals. In short, an RSS should identify where growth is planned for, what capacity is needed, how it is funded and staged over time, and how that fits in with the other priorities that councils and communities have for the region. By providing a collective regional view, an RSS will also enable better integration with central government and its own investment in critical infrastructure across education, health and transport.

As is often the case in planning, this inventory raised as many new questions as it answered, demonstrating the complexity of the task ahead. The recommendations outlined in this inventory are based on the current statutory context and roles of local government but it is important to consider the changing political landscape particularly in terms of the inclusion of spatial planning in resource management reform legislation in New Zealand as the development of an RSS for the Waikato region moves forward.

[67] Ministry for Housing and Urban Development 2024. Going for Housing Growth: Implementing the First Stage. https://www.hud.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/Proactive-Releases/Cabinet-Paper-Going-for-Housing-Growth-Implementing-the-First-Stage.pdf

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Appendix 1: Literature review – what is spatial planning

A 2011 Waikato Regional Council research report[68] on a potential strategic spatial planning model for the Waikato region provides useful background on what spatial planning can be and what the key components of a spatial plan/strategy are.

Key findings of this study include:

- Spatial planning should combine a top-down approach, where a vision informs strategic directions and actions, and bottom-up, where local issues, needs, constraints, and opportunities inform strategic directions and actions.
- A spatial plan should be a community plan developed by participants who can represent a broad cross section of society and stakeholders. It should not be a plan for, and of, any particular council. Extensive collaboration with residents and stakeholders is important to achieve this. Ideally, decision making with respect to plan contents should not lie solely with politicians.
- Spatial planning should include a process whereby participants learn about the practice of spatial planning and about the nature of issues to be addressed.
- Spatial planning can benefit from asking 'what if' questions through a process that evaluates a range of future development scenarios. A favoured future scenario can then be chosen from which a vision statement is developed.
- A spatial plan should include an assessment of the potential impacts of key plan directions on society and the environment.
- Spatial plan development can be usefully supported through 'theme groups' or single issue working groups comprising experts and interested individuals who collate and assess information on topics such as environmental protection, economic development, infrastructure development and social issues, and recommend solutions and directions.
- While addressing local and regional issues, a spatial plan should also respond to national and global issues and trends.
- A useful way to begin a spatial planning process is through a "kick-off" conference where interested people can meet to hear presentations about spatial planning and begin discussions about the process of developing the plan and about issues it should address.
- Spatial planning should be informed by a comprehensive information base, which includes factual information about issues, relevant existing policies and strategies and information about community concerns, values and wishes.
- It is useful for spatial planning to include (or lead to) an action plan with clear actions, priorities, timelines, funding arrangements, and identification of agencies responsible for each action.
- Regional spatial planning works best where there is strong national policy to direct and inform such planning.

The study identified that the key content of a spatial plan/strategy would be:

- A regional profile, comprising a description of the region, local and regional pressures and issues.
- Relevant national objectives, strategies and policies.
- A review of potential future development scenarios that results in choosing a preferred scenario, overarching vision and strategic directions to achieve the vision.
- Regional development principles, objectives, targets and priorities.
- Environmental and social impact assessment of key directions.

[68] Huijbers J. 2011. A potential strategic spatial planning model for the Waikato region – research report. Waikato Regional Council and University of Applied Sciences Hasdenbosch

- An action plan, including lead agencies, phasing, timelines, and funding needed to implement the strategy.

The study identifies a definition of spatial planning from the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment (unknown date) as:

A spatial plan is a high level strategy for developing a region that relates to its geography, and seeks to achieve desired broad outcomes. Developed and implemented via collaboration between multiple parties, it provides a mechanism for agreeing joint priorities, actions and investment.

Spatial planning is:

- *multi-party - a tool for collaboration between the key decision-makers;*
- *focused on the long-term development of cities and regions and improving investment certainty;*
- *a guide to the location and timing of future infrastructure, services and investment that can be used to provide for the co-location of infrastructure where this is appropriate;*
- *evidence based;*
- *integrated across sectors - by example transport, land use, housing, education, funding policy and regulatory policy - to achieve broad outcomes (economic, social, environmental, cultural); and,*
- *strategic - provides direction to regional funding policy, regulation and other implementation plans (by example transport, economic development).*

Spatial planning is not:

- *prescriptive regulation; and,*
- *only about land use.*[69]

Spatial Planning Act 2022 (repealed)

The Spatial Planning Act (SPA) 2022 was enacted in August 2023, however, following a change in government in October 2023, the SPA was repealed in December 2023. As of March 2025, there has been no replacement legislation in New Zealand for the SPA or any further direction from government on strategic and spatial planning.

However, given there is no specific national direction on this topic, the SPA provides useful context on the scope, general contents and form of an RSS, which assists in the development of an RSS inventory for the Waikato region.

The purpose of the SPA was to provide for regional spatial strategies that assist in upholding te Oranga o te Taiao[70] and promote integration in the performance of functions under legislation including the Natural and Built Environment Act 2022 (repealed), the Land Transport Management Act 2003, the Local Government Act 2002, and the Water Services Entities Act 2022 (repealed).

Section 15 directed that an RSS must, among other things:

[69] Huijbers, Jan 2011. A potential strategic spatial planning model for the Waikato region – research report. Waikato Regional Council and University of Applied Sciences Hasdenbosch, page 11

[70] The Natural and Built Environment Act 2023 (repealed) defines Te Oranga o te Taiao as

a) the health of the natural environment; and
b) the relationship between the health of the natural environment and its capacity to sustain life; and
c) the relationship between the health of the natural environment and the health and well-being of people and communities; and
d) the interconnectedness of all parts of the environment; and
e) the relationship between iwi and hapū and te Taiao that is based on whakapapa.

- set the strategic direction for the use, development, protection, restoration, and enhancement of the environment of the region for a time span of not less than 30 years; and
- provide for the integrated management of the environment; and
- support the efficient and effective management of the environment.

This inventory has taken guidance from Sections 17 and 18, which set out the key matters to be addressed and/or included in an RSS, including:

- areas that require or may require protection, restoration, or enhancement
- areas of cultural heritage and areas with resources that are of significance to Māori
- areas that are appropriate for urban development and change, including existing, planned, or potential urban centres of scale
- areas that are appropriate for developing, using, or extracting natural resources, including generating energy
- areas that are appropriate to be reserved for rural use or where there is expected to be change in the type of rural use
- areas of the coastal marine area that are appropriate for development or change in use
- existing, planned, or potential infrastructure that is or may be required to meet current and future needs
- opportunities to make better use of existing infrastructure
- indicative locations for infrastructure that is or may be required to support the production of renewable energy or other measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- areas that are suitable for land use change that would support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions
- areas that are or will be vulnerable to those risks:
- indicative locations for infrastructure that is or may be required to reduce natural hazard risks or increase resilience to them
- areas that are suitable for land use change that would reduce natural hazard risks or increase resilience to them
- areas where any development or change in use needs to be carefully managed because the areas are subject to constraints (other than those described in paragraph (i)(i)):
- the indicative location of planned or potential business and residential activities and the likely general scale and intensity of those activities, if that information is necessary to inform the consideration of any other matters described in this subsection.
- matters of national or regional importance including:
    - matters that increase or reduce the use of land or water, or change its use
    - matters that increase, reduce, or change transport patterns (being patterns relating to location, frequency, or modes of travel)
    - matters relates to environmental effects that are best managed at a regional level (such as effects on water catchments)
    - matters of a scale or significance that requires planning for, or investment in, infrastructure to be done or arranged at a regional level
    - matters critical to the development or functioning of the region or any of its cities
    - matters critical to the regional or national economy
    - matters that require collaboration between infrastructure providers, local authorities and/or central government.

Section 22 set out general requirements for the use and presentation of information. It required that an RSS is, as far as practicable, based on robust and reliable evidence and other information, including mātauranga Māori, that is proportionate to the level of detail required in the particular context. It required that an RSS be set out in a way that is easy for interested parties and other members of the public to use and understand, including through the appropriate use of maps and other visual illustrations of spatial matters. It also provided for

matters to be represented at different spatial scales depending on what is appropriate for the matter.

Particularly relevant in the development of this inventory is the direction in clauses 22(2) and (3) that uncertainty or inadequacy in the available information must not be used as a reason to omit content from an RSS if it is considered that including the content is necessary to achieve the purpose of the Act. It does however require that where uncertain or inadequate information is used it must be considered how information may become more detailed or otherwise be improved over time, including key actions that support the development of more certain or complete information.

Other sections of the SPA that are relevant considerations for the purpose of this inventory include:

- Section 19 that directed that every statutory acknowledgement that applies in a region must be attached to, and treated as part of, the regional spatial strategy for that region.
- Section 20 that referred to Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato.
- Section 25 that required that customary marine title areas and the common marine and coastal area outside title areas are provided for.
- Section 26 that required that RSSs must recognise that identified Māori land is a taonga tuku iho for the owners of the land and the hapū associated with the land and consider the rights and interests of owners of identified Māori land to retain, control, utilise, and occupy the land for the benefit of present and future generations of owners, their whānau, and their hapū.
- Section 27 that provided for RSSs to incorporate information about the state and characteristics of the environment, including information about infrastructure and other aspects of the built environment, designations, and environmental limits and targets.
- Schedule 4 Clause 1 that required consideration of the relative importance of the matters covered in an RSS.

New Zealand examples of spatial plans

Through the development of this inventory, existing spatial plans and strategies were reviewed to gain an understanding of the types of information that are commonly portrayed in them. A couple of local examples of spatial plans in New Zealand are summarised below.

Auckland Plan 2050

The first Auckland Plan was adopted in 2012 following the amalgamation of local authorities into Auckland Council. It is one of the only local examples of a region-wide spatial plan and long-term strategy for growth and development.

The plan is required to:

- Set a strategic direction for Auckland and its communities that integrates social, economic, environmental, and cultural objectives.
- Outline a high-level development strategy that will achieve that direction and those objectives.
- Enable coherent and co-ordinated decision making by Auckland Council (as the spatial planning agency) and other parties to determine the future location and timing of critical infrastructure, services, and investment within Auckland in accordance with the strategy.
- Provide a basis for aligning the implementation plans, regulatory plans, and funding programmes of the council.

Auckland Plan 2050 builds upon the 2012 version, taking away the following key learnings that are useful for the purpose of this inventory:

- To use a small number of organising and inter-linking themes around Auckland's key challenges; and
- To set high level objectives (spatial and non-spatial) in these theme areas with a brief narrative.

Auckland Council identified the following key issues in updating the 2012 plan:

- Out of date data – majority of information was based on 2006 census data and does not reflect strategic work carried out since the plan was adopted.
- Complex structure – the plan contained too many layers and components with limited integration, which made it hard to work with and understand, affecting implementation of the plan.
- No prioritisation – the plan did not prioritise across the large number of strategic directions.

The strategic themes of the plan reflect the metropolitan nature of the Auckland region and are mostly people-centric. They are:

- Skills and jobs
- Belonging
- Homes and places
- Protect and enhance (environmental, cultural and built heritage)
- Access and connectivity
- Development strategy (long-term view on growth and infrastructure needs).

Auckland Plan 2050 contains a wide range of maps to spatially represent key data inputs, including (but not limited to):

- Population/census data (including projections)
- Infrastructure cost projections
- Rates of income, home ownership, employment and education.
- Iwi affiliation counts and people of Maori descent
- Voter turnout in local body elections
- Sites of significance to Maori
- Tribal overlaps
- Ethnicity distribution
- Strategic road network
- Cycling priority areas
- Rapid transport network
- Access to jobs by public transport
- Areas at risk from sea level rise
- Public assets
- Open space areas
- Heritage sites
- Jobs in advanced industries
- Proximity to education facility
- Existing urban areas and future urban areas including sequencing
- Anticipated growth (housing and business development capacity)
- Zoning
- Wastewater systems and plants
- Water supply
- Social infrastructure
- Critical infrastructure.

The below map provides an example of how environmental risks and opportunities may be shown in a spatial plan.

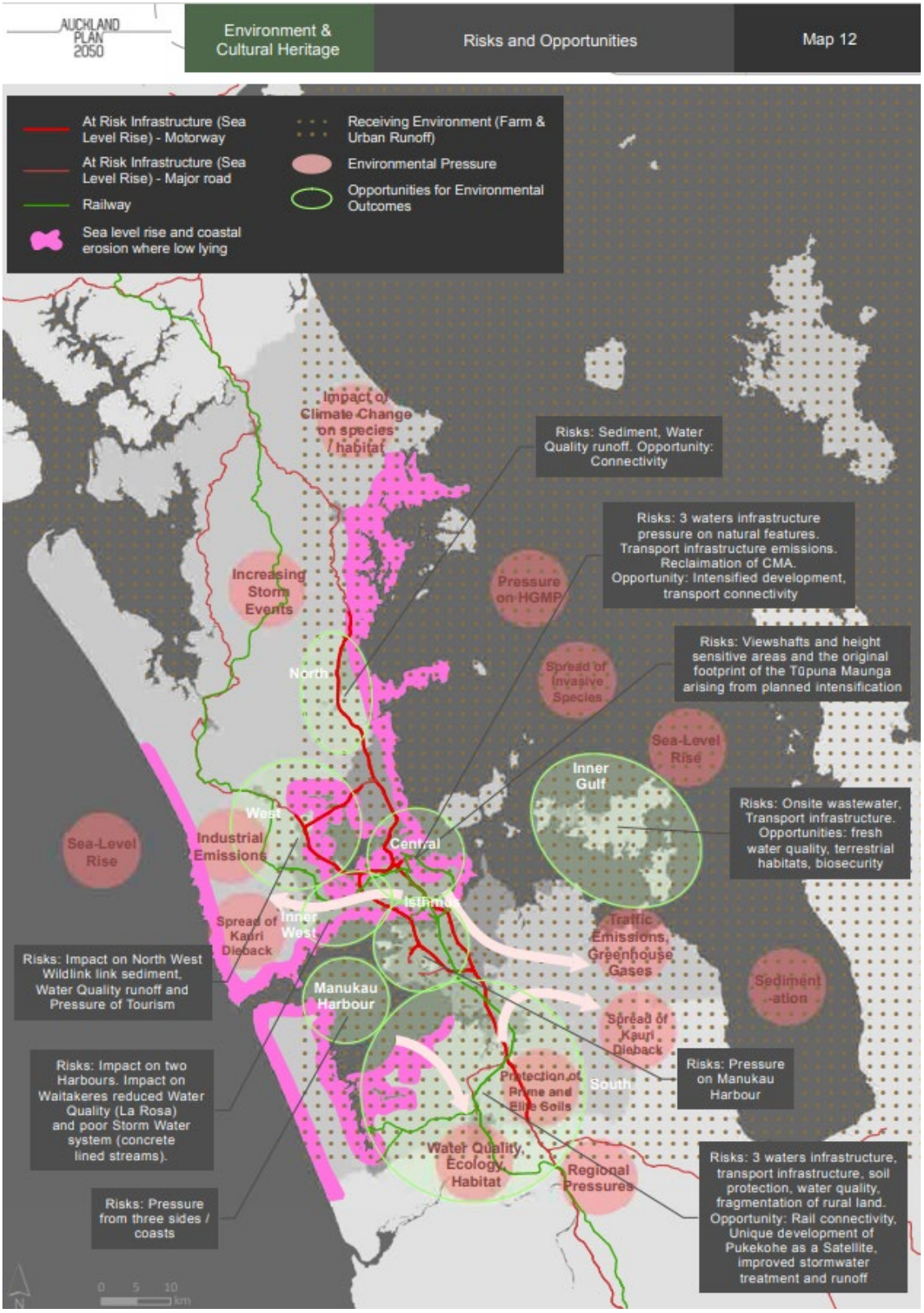


Figure 15: Auckland Spatial Plan map – Environment and Cultural Heritage – Risks and Opportunities[71]

Eastern Bay Spatial Plan

The Eastern Bay Spatial Plan is currently being developed at the time of writing this report. It is the only example from this review of a collaborative plan between district councils (Whakatāne, Kawerau and Ōpotiki), iwi, government agencies (Ministry of Transport, Waka Kotahi, Ministry

[71] Auckland Council 2018. Auckland Plan 2050. p.148. https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/auckland-plan/about-the-auckland-plan/docsprintdocuments/auckland-plan-2050-print-document.pdf

of Housing and Urban Development, Kāinga Ora and Ministry of Education) and the regional council (Bay of Plenty).

The plan intends to provide a roadmap of where local communities want to head and help unlock economic development and define new places for housing development against the backdrop of a changing climate and other environmental issues.

Although the plan is still in development, the available consultation material provides some insights into the options being considered and the existing information that will feed into the plan. Information about people, towns, water, existing and future climate and natural hazard risks, roading, landscapes, land uses, soils, businesses and the environment provide an initial snapshot of the sub-region. Existing data inputs that are represented include:

- Population data (including age and ethnicity demographics and growth projections)
- Economic data (including GDP and social deprivation index)
- Infrastructure and connections (ports, roads, rail, power generation)
- Existing urban areas and identified areas for growth
- Community facilities (health, education, marae, aged care)
- Vehicle traffic
- Natural features (native and exotic forests, rivers and lakes)
- Conservation land
- High value agricultural and horticultural land
- Māori freehold land
- Natural hazards (active fault lines, historic flood extents)
- Regionally significant industry (agriculture, aquaculture, dairy, forestry, health, horticulture, manufacturing, processing).

The consultation document indicates that Mātauranga Māori and additional information from the community will complete the snapshot and guide the future of the Eastern Bay Spatial Plan. The below map provides an example of how a spatial plan might show areas of constraint and areas to protect from development.

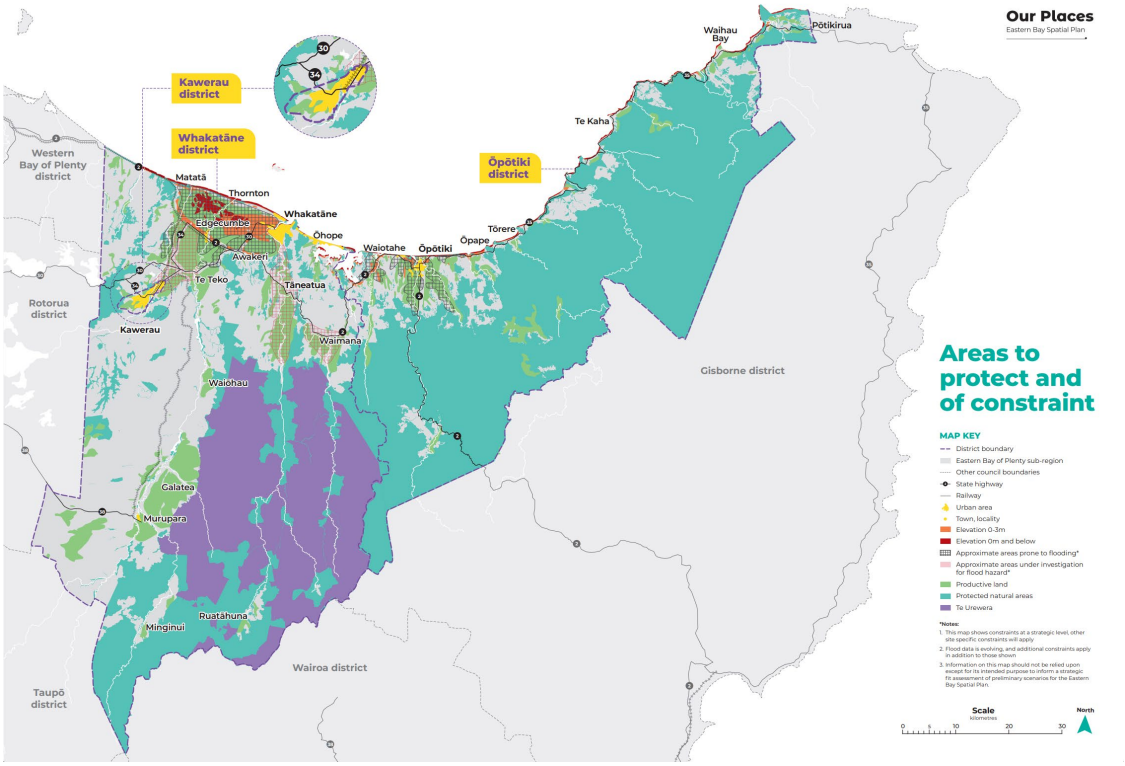


Figure 16: Eastern Bay Spatial Plan map – Areas to protect and of constraint.[72]

[72] Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Kawerau District Council, Ōpōtiki District Council and Whakatāne District Council 2024. Our Places - Eastern Bay Spatial Plan. https://ourplacesebop.org.nz/

International examples of spatial plans

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

The Welsh Government published its spatial strategy and national development framework for Wales on in 2021. It is the highest level of development plan in Wales with a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system. A key message from the plan is "good planning ensures the right development is put in the right place."

The plan does not work in isolation; it enables plans at the regional and local scales to identify schemes and projects that benefit communities and contributes towards achieving the national ambitions set by Future Wales.

Key themes from the plan include:

- sustaining and developing a vibrant economy
- achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience
- developing strong ecosystems, and
- improving the health and well-being of communities.

Figure 15 below spatially represents the key themes and identifies the key data inputs as:

- Transport network – motorway, trunk roads, railways
- Ports – ferry, freight, air
- National parks
- Areas of outstanding natural beauty
- National cycle network.

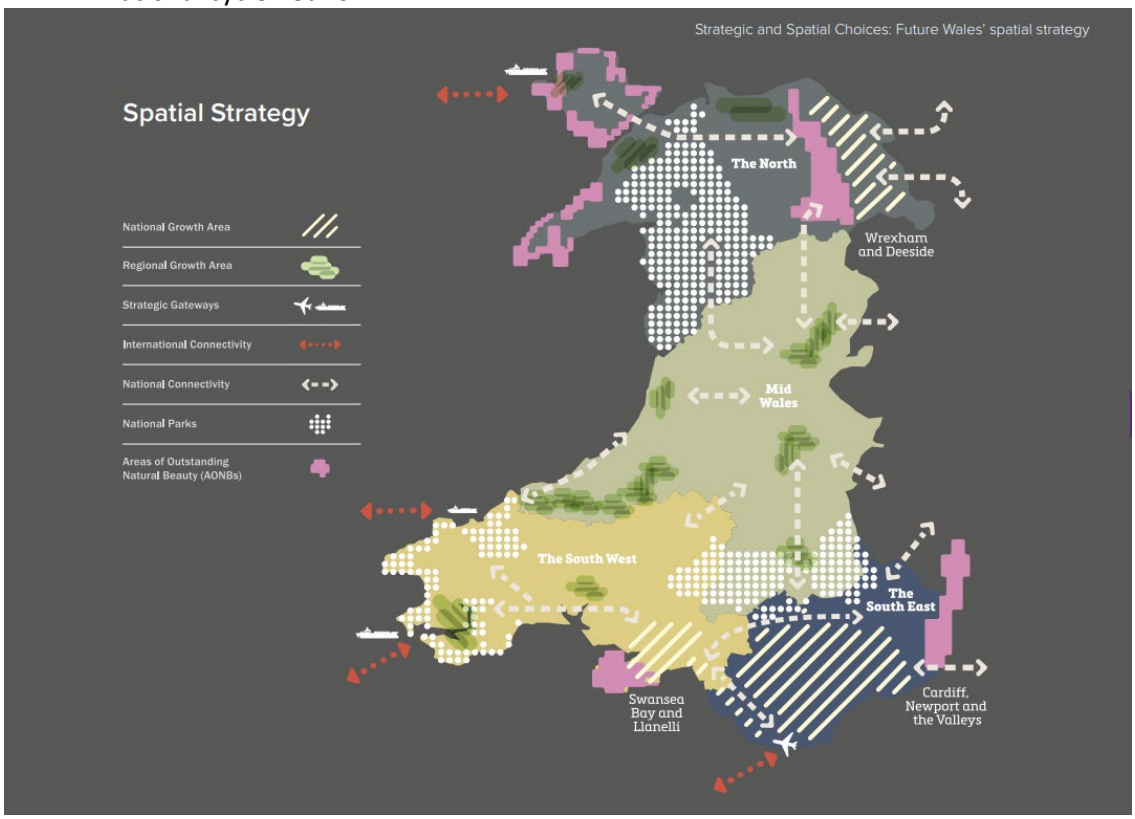


Figure 17: Future Wales 2040 Spatial Strategy map[73]

Other key data inputs to the plan include:

- Population data
- Health and life expectancy data

[73] Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government 2021. Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. p.61. https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-02/future-wales-the-national-plan-2040.pdf

- Urban and rural land distribution
- Language data
- Ecosystem resilience
- Mineral resources
- Agricultural and versatile land grades
- Water resources
- Ramsar sites, special areas of conservation, special protection areas
- Heritage sites
- Employment and industry data
- Commuting patterns
- Broadband connection
- Climate projections
- Greenhouse gas emissions

Appendix 2: Statutory context

Resource Management Act 1991

The RMA is the main piece of legislation that governs the management of New Zealand's natural and built environment and how people can interact with natural resources.

The RMA does not include explicit direction for regional spatial strategies and lacks a formal consistent framework for long-term strategic spatial planning.

It does however set direction around air, soil, freshwater, the coastal and marine area and regulates land use, the provision of infrastructure and allocation of resources, all of which will be addressed by an RSS.

Part 2 sets out the purpose and principles of the RMA. The Part 2 clauses provide insight into what strategic and spatial planning (in a land use context) might include:

- 5(2) - … sustainable management means managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being and for their health and safety while—
  (a) sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and
  (b) safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and
  (c) avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.

- 6 - Matters of national importance (to recognise and provide for)
  (a) the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (including the coastal marine area), wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development:
  (b) the protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development:
  (c) the protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna:
  (d) the maintenance and enhancement of public access to and along the coastal marine area, lakes, and rivers:
  (e) the relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu, and other taonga:
  (f) the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development:
  (g) the protection of protected customary rights:
  (h) the management of significant risks from natural hazards.

- 7 – Other matters (to have particular regard to)
  (a) kaitiakitanga:
  (aa) the ethic of stewardship:
  (b) the efficient use and development of natural and physical resources:
  (ba) the efficiency of the end use of energy:
  (c) the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values:
  (d) intrinsic values of ecosystems:
  (f) maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment:
  (g) any finite characteristics of natural and physical resources:
  (h) the protection of the habitat of trout and salmon:
  (i) the effects of climate change:
  (j) the benefits to be derived from the use and development of renewable energy.

- 8 - … all persons exercising functions and powers under it, in relation to managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources, shall take into account the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi).

Clause 30 of the RMA sets out the functions of regional councils, one of which is the strategic integration of infrastructure with land use through objectives, policies, and methods. While it does not explicitly require strategic and spatial planning to be used or considered as a method, it is clear that strategic planning of land use and infrastructure falls within Waikato Regional Council's responsibilities as a local authority.

The RMA also sets out engagement and consultation requirements for resource management planning documents, the principles of which are often applied to non-statutory planning, and may be useful in the preparation of an RSS.

National Policy Statements

Issued under the RMA, national policy statements provide national direction for matters of national significance relevant to sustainable management. RMA planning documents must give effect to national policy statements. In the absence of spatial planning legislation, an RSS would not be required to give effect to national policy statements but given the purpose of spatial planning tends to be linked to resource management it would be prudent to take them into account.

There are eight national policy statements currently in force:

- National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management 2020
- National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020
- National Policy Statement on Renewable Electricity Generation 2011
- New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010
- National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008
- National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land 2022
- National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023
- National Policy Statement for Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Industrial Process 2023

Resource management reform

In 2024 the Government announced its intentions for resource management reform,[74] which includes the repeal of the RMA and its replacement with two Acts – one to manage environmental effects arising from activities, and another to enable urban development and infrastructure. It is expected that regional spatial planning will be incorporated in some way into the latter of these Acts. The aim is for these Acts to be passed into law by mid-2026 and so development of an RSS for the Waikato region will need to be responsive to any changes in direction.

The key objectives of resource management reform are:

- Unlocking development capacity for housing and business growth.
- Enabling delivery of high-quality infrastructure for the future, including doubling renewable energy.
- Enabling primary sector growth and development, including aquaculture, forestry, pastoral, horticulture, and mining.

Key elements of the reform programme relevant to spatial planning are:

- Repeal of the Spatial Planning Act 2023.
- Introduction of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024.

[74] Ministry for the Environment 2024. RM reform update – September 2024. Twenty-First edition. https://environment.govt.nz/news/rm-reform-update-september-2024/#changes-to-free-up-more-capacity-for-housing

- To Going for Housing Growth Programme, which involves system changes to address the underlying causes of housing supply shortage and unaffordability, including:
    - Freeing up land for urban development, including removing unnecessary planning barriers,
    - Improving infrastructure funding and financing to support urban growth, and
    - Providing incentives for communities and councils to support growth.
- Changes to 14 pieces of national direction and creation of 7 new pieces of national direction, covering topics such as infrastructure, energy, housing, farming / primary sector and natural hazards.

Spatial Planning is a critical component in delivering a coordinated approach across the region to deliver these system changes especially when it comes to addressing the best locations for growth and development and how to fund infrastructure delivery for transport, community and three waters.

Effective spatial planning is critical to the reform's outcomes because it can:

- Identify broadly where future development capacity to meet government's housing growth targets will be provided, guiding efficient infrastructure planning and funding decisions.
- Ensure long-term land-use planning is integrated with infrastructure, including corridor and site protection over a longer time horizon.
- Support flexibility and developer-led growth, by providing good quality information about where and when future development capacity and infrastructure is expected to be provided, which, together with improvements to infrastructure funding and financing, will provide a better basis for developers to bring forward growth areas where they can meet the costs of development.
- Provide certainty that strategic growth planning will flow through to implementation, supporting joint planning and integrated investment by local and central government and other parties.
- Address disincentives for councils and communities to support growth by making it easier for councils to plan for future growth.

Te Ture Whaimana

Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato, the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River (Te Ture Whaimana), is the primary direction setting document for the Waikato River and its catchments. It has the effect of a National Policy Statement and sets out clear requirements for achieving objectives and ensuring activities are controlled with respect to any adverse effects on the health and wellbeing of the Waikato and Waipā rivers. Te Ture Whaimana prevails over other national direction where there is any inconsistency.

Section 20 in the SPA stated that Te Ture Whaimana in its entirety is deemed to be part of any regional spatial strategy that affects the Waikato River or the Waipā River or activities within their catchments, and the remainder of the strategy must give effect to Te Ture Whaimana.

The objectives of Te Ture Whaimana are:

- The restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River
- The restoration and protection of the relationship of Waikato-Tainui with the Waikato River, including their economic, social, cultural, and spiritual relationships.
- The restoration and protection of the relationship of Waikato River iwi according to their tikanga and kawa, with the Waikato River, including their economic, social, cultural and spiritual relationships.
- The restoration and protection of the relationship of the Waikato region's communities with the Waikato River including their economic, social, cultural and spiritual relationships

- The integrated, holistic and coordinated approach to management of the natural, physical, cultural and historic resources of the Waikato River.
- The adoption of a precautionary approach towards decisions that may result in significant adverse effects on the Waikato River, and in particular those effects that threaten serious or irreversible damage to the Waikato River.
- The recognition and avoidance of adverse cumulative effects, and potential cumulative effects, of activities undertaken both on the Waikato River and within its catchments on the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River.
- The recognition that the Waikato River is degraded and should not be required to absorb further degradation as a result of human activities.
- The protection and enhancement of significant sites, fisheries, flora and fauna.
- The recognition that the strategic importance of the Waikato River to New Zealand's social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing requires the restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River.
- The restoration of water quality within the Waikato River so that it is safe for people to swim in and take food from over its entire length.
- The promotion of improved access to the Waikato River to better enable sporting, recreational, and cultural opportunities.
- The application to the above of both mātauranga Māori and latest available scientific methods.

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

The Fast-track Approvals Act's purpose is to deliver infrastructure and other development projects with significant regional or national benefits. The Act's one-stop-shop approach consolidates and speeds up the multiple approval processes under different legislation that are typically required for large and/or complex projects.

A broad range of projects have access to the fast-track process if they meet eligibility criteria. Projects may include infrastructure, housing, resource extraction, aquaculture, renewable energy, and other developments.

The Act lists a number of initial projects that can apply directly for approvals, of which 19 are in the Waikato region. Six of these are housing and land development projects, five are mining and quarrying, four are renewable energy projects and the remaining four are infrastructure projects covering roading and a wastewater treatment plant upgrade.[75]

Additional projects can apply to go through the fast-track process, and there are two known applications for housing and land development in the Waikato region underway at the time of preparing this inventory.

An RSS will need to be responsive to any fast-track projects that are proposed and may also be used as a tool for providing local authority feedback on any proposals, as is provided for under the Act. An RSS will also be useful for identifying any additional fast-track projects in the Waikato region that local authorities or other stakeholders want to pursue.

Local Government Act 2002

The purpose of the LGA is to provide for democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities; and, to that end, the Act—

- states the purpose of local government
- provides a framework and powers for local authorities to decide which activities they undertake and the manner in which they will undertake them
- promotes the accountability of local authorities to their communities

[75] Fast Track Approvals Bill: 19 big Waikato projects to boost economy and speed up builds - NZ Herald

- provides for local authorities to play a broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of their communities, taking a sustainable development approach.

A key requirement of local authorities under the LGA is to prepare and adopt a long-term plan (LTP) to describe the activities of the local authority and the community outcomes for the region/district. LTPs provide insight into the current and future issues for the region and districts, which may inform the key themes of an RSS.

The LGA requires local authorities to prepare and adopt an infrastructure strategy as part of its LTP. The purpose of the infrastructure strategy is to identify significant infrastructure issues for the local authority and identify the principal options for managing those issues and the implications of those options. It must outline how the local authority intends to manage its infrastructure assets, taking into account the need to:

- renew or replace existing assets
- respond to growth or decline in the demand for services reliant on those assets
- allow for planned increases or decreases in levels of service provided through those assets
- maintain or improve public health and environmental outcomes or mitigate adverse effects on them
- provide for the resilience of infrastructure assets by identifying and managing risks relating to natural hazards and by making appropriate financial provision for those risks.

The infrastructure strategy must outline the most likely scenario for the management of infrastructure assets over time and identify assumptions about the life cycle of significant assets and growth and decline in demand for services.

Specific infrastructure assets that may be relevant considerations for an RSS include those relating to:

- water supply
- sewerage (including treatment and disposal)
- drainage
- flood protection and control
- roads, footpaths and other transport infrastructure.

Given the above, infrastructure strategies may provide useful insights at an RSS level, particularly in terms of key regional and inter-regional infrastructure and thinking about what infrastructure may be needed to support future development and growth.

The LGA also sets out consultation principles and requirements for local authority decision making that, in the absence of strategic and spatial planning legislation, would direct the process for developing an RSS.[76]

Land Transport Management Act 2003

The purpose of the LTMA is to contribute to an effective, efficient, and safe land transport system in the public interest.

The key responsibility of Waikato Regional Council under the LTMA is the preparation of a regional land transport plan (RLTP) every six years. An RLTP must set out the region's land transport objectives, policies, and measures for at least 10 years and must include matters such as[77]:

- a statement of transport priorities for the region,

[76] Clause 87 of the LGA enables a local authority to choose to use the special consultative procedure.
[77] Land Transport Management Act 2003, clause 16 – Form and content of regional land transport plans

- an identification of activities that have inter-regional significance
- activities relating to public transport services
- activities relating to State highways.

Part 3 of the LTMA sets out requirements for land transport strategic documents – specifically the Government Policy Statement (GPS) on land transport. The GPS must set out the expected results from the allocation of the national land transport fund, and the land transport investment strategy. The GPS is not a spatial strategy but it provides information on government transport priorities that may inform regional strategic planning for transport, both via an RLTP and RSS.

Other relevant legislation

There are other pieces of legislation that contain relevant direction to strategic and spatial planning but that are not explicit responsibilities of WRC or local government. While not an exhaustive list, some other relevant legislation is briefly summarised below:

- **Education and Training Act 2020** – domestic students are entitled to free education at any state school or charter school, with a requirement for those aged 6-16 to be enrolled at a registered school. Where urban growth is enabled under the RMA, the Ministry of Education must provision student spaces within the network of schools.

- **Conservation Act 1987** – land identified in an RSS may be subject to a conservation management strategy or plan, a freshwater fisheries management plan or a sport fish and game management plan. These do not have direct effects on local authorities or their strategic documents but may be useful to consider in the development of an RSS. Conservation areas would be useful to spatially identify in an RSS.

- **Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011** – local authorities must take into account any customary marine title planning documents when making any decision under the LGA in relation to the customary marine title area. This may apply to the development and implementation of an RSS. A regional council must also recognise and provide for customary marine title planning documents under its RMA plans and policies. While this currently does not have any implications for an RSS (which is not an RMA document), there may be future implications if spatial planning is brought into resource management legislation through system reform.

- **Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022** - health system principles provide common expectations across the health system to protect and promote people's health and wellbeing. Pae Ora requires the Ministry of Health to develop 7 health strategies, a Government Policy Statement and a New Zealand Health Plan to set out the delivery of publicly funded health services.

Appendix 3: Demographic and economic profiles

Demographic profile

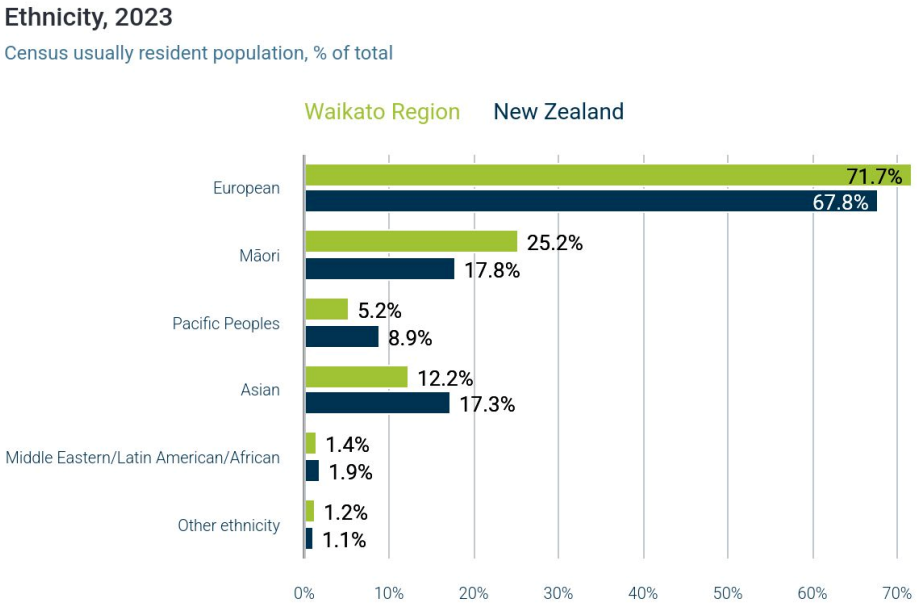
The Waikato Region is home to an estimated 536,200 people[78] – around 10 percent of the total population of New Zealand.

Approximately 59% of the region's population lives in urban areas, and 41% in rural areas.[79] The main urban centre of the region is Hamilton City, which is home to more than a third of the people of the region, with a population of about 192,000.[80] Nearly another 30% of the region's population lives in the districts of Waikato and Waipā, which surround Hamilton.

Hamilton has a high population density at around 1,600 people per square kilometre. Southern parts of the region are much more sparsely populated, with the lowest population density in the Waitomo District, which has an average of three people per square kilometre. Ōtorohanga and Taupō districts also have low population density.[81]

The ethnic makeup of the region is similar to New Zealand overall but has a significantly higher share of people identifying as Māori (25% compared to 17% nationally) and lower shares identifying as Pacific people or Asian. The main exceptions to this are in South Waikato, which has a larger share of Pacific people in its community, and Hamilton City with a large share of Asian people.

While the Māori proportion of the population is high across most of the region, it is particularly high in the south of the region, including Waitomo (45%), South Waikato (36%), Ōtorohanga and Taupō (both 30%). The Māori population also has a much younger age profile than the general population with half of the region's Māori population aged under 25 years old.



[78] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region 2024. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/growth?compare=waikato-region

[79] Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora 2025. Snapshot of Health New Zealand Waikato. https://www.waikatodhb.govt.nz/about-us/snapshot-of-waikato-dhb

[80] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region. Population growth – Hamilton City. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/growth?compare=hamilton-city

[81] Waikato Regional Council 2022. The economy of the Waikato Region in 2022. TR 2022/17. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

Figure 18: Ethnicity makeup of New Zealand and the Waikato Region 2023[82]

Overall, the age distribution of the Waikato population is also similar to that of New Zealand as a whole. However, this varies greatly across the region. Hamilton City has a particularly young population – its median age of 32.7 is one of the youngest in New Zealand. In contrast, Thames-Coromandel has the highest median age of any district in New Zealand at 54.8 years. It is projected that 59% of the Thames Coromandel population will be aged 65 years and over by the year 2043. Hauraki and Taupō districts also have populations skewed towards the older end of the distribution (47.5 and 41.9 percent respectively). The region's overall dependency ratio (determined by proportion of those aged under 14 and over 65) is higher than the New Zealand average at 59.4%, demonstrating that Waikato has an aging population.

Figure 19: Age composition of New Zealand and the Waikato Region, 2024[83]

The school-aged population is experiencing growth across parts of the region, particularly in Hamilton City, Waikato and Waipā districts. Conversely, the southern part of the region is trending down in school-aged population numbers.[84] Likely factors in this pattern of growth include:

- An increase in internal migration to Hamilton and surrounding districts.
- Hamilton is projected to continue high population growth.
- Numerous major residential subdivisions in towns across Waipā, Matamata-Piako and Waikato.
- More affordable housing in the region compared to Auckland.
- Increased infill housing in central Hamilton.

Population growth[85] in the region has averaged 2.0% per annum over the past five years, increasing by around 11,400 people in the year to June 2024, primarily through international net migration. Within this, Thames Coromandel District and Hauraki District had low population

[82] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region – Ethnicity. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/census/indicator/ethnicity?compare=new-zealand&census=waikato-region

[83] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region – Age composition. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/age-composition?compare=new-zealand

[84] Ministry of Education 2024. National Education Network Plans Update. https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-12/National-Education-Network-Plans-2024-Update.pdf?VersionId=3ONIyta4k5gIpvQT5lVxkShEckH5uzjJ

[85] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region – Population growth. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/population/growth

growth at 0.3 and 0.9% respectively, whilst Hamilton City had the highest growth in the region and grew 3.1%.

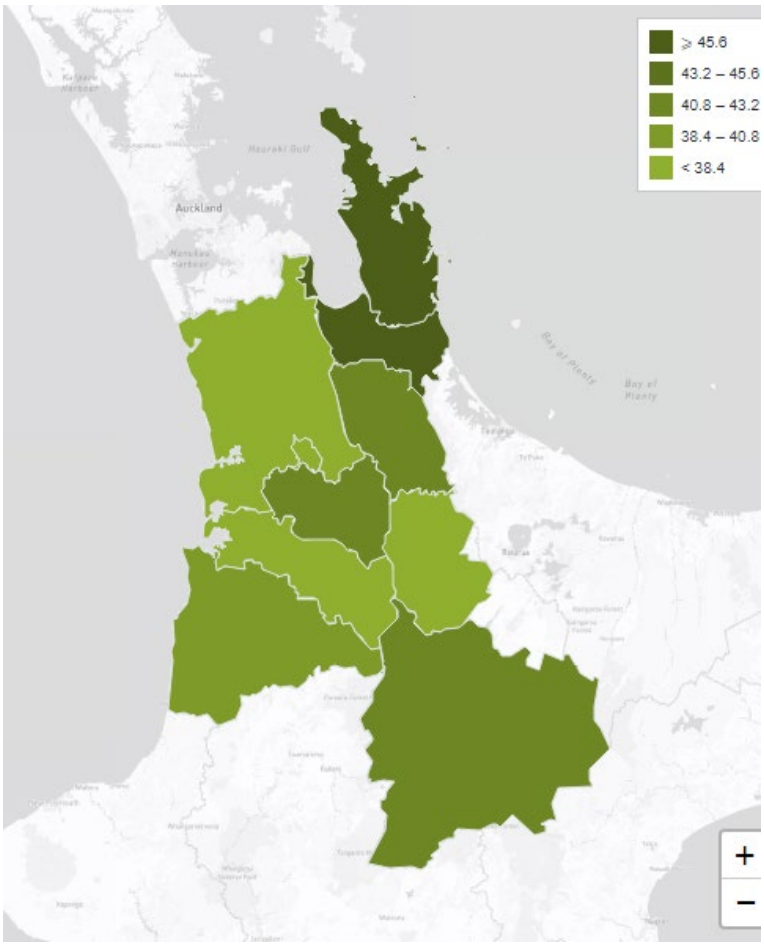


Figure 20: Median age across the Waikato Region 2023[86]

Waikato population projections are currently based on 2018 data and are currently being updated to reflect the 2023 census baseline. A 2021 Waikato Regional Council technical report[87] outlines the demographic projections of the Waikato region including low, medium and high scenarios for each of population, family and household, and labour force, to a projection horizon of 2068. The report projects overall growth for the region, but at a slower rate than previously experienced, due to a 'reset' in net international migration following the coronavirus pandemic.

In summary of the report, districts across the region are projected to have differing growth trajectories. Thames-Coromandel and Hauraki districts are projected to experience spill-over growth from surrounding and nearby faster-growing districts, combined with an ageing population structure. Waikato, Matamata-Piako, Waipā, and Taupō districts are projected to experience population growth driven by internal migration along with an ageing population. Hamilton City is projected to experience strong population growth driven by internal migration along with maintaining a relatively young population age structure. Ōtorohanga District is projected to experience similar effects to Hamilton City, but where net international out-migration has a greater effect. South Waikato and Waitomo Districts are projected to experience spill-over growth from surrounding and nearby faster-growing districts that becomes more substantial over time, combined with maintaining a relatively young population age structure.

[86] Infometrics 2025. Regional Economic Profile – Waikato Region – Census median age. https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/waikato-region/census/compare-areas/within-area/broad-age-group/age-median?census=waikato-region

[87] Waikato Regional Council 2021. 2018-base Population, Family and Household, and Labour Force Projections for the Waikato Region, 2018-2068. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/WRC-2019/TR202122.pdf

Economic profile

The Waikato is the fourth largest regional economy in New Zealand. It is endowed with rich natural resources and its proximity to Auckland and the Bay of Plenty bring significant economic advantages. Links to Auckland and the Port of Tauranga provide ready access to export markets and make the region a crucial logistics hub. The region overall is very diverse, balancing the emerging metropolis of Hamilton as a centre of manufacturing and services, with highly varied and specialised local economies with comparative advantages based on primary industries.

The total gross domestic product (GDP) of the Waikato region in 2021 was $29.2 billion according to Statistics NZ, around nine percent of the national economy. GDP for the region has risen by an average of 2.3% per annum over the last 20 years, however, this has not translated directly into improved prosperity for the people of the region. GDP per capita has increased by only 0.7% per annum, and productivity (GDP per worker) has declined in the region over the last five years.

The Waikato region is known as an agricultural (particularly dairy farming) region, largely due to its disproportionately large amount of highly productive land. Pastoral farming is now the dominant land use in the region, making up 53% of its total area. Agriculture contributed 8.4% of regional GDP in 2021, a larger proportion of regional GDP than any other industry. Except for Hamilton City, all the districts in the region have important specialisations in agriculture, ranging from 4.9% of GDP in Thames-Coromandel to nearly 32% of GDP in Ōtorohanga.

The various parts of the region have additional specialisations that relate to their particular circumstances: Waitomo in agriculture, iron mining and tourism; South Waikato in forestry and related manufacturing; Matamata-Piako in food manufacturing; Taupō in geothermal energy, forestry and tourism-related industries; Thames-Coromandel in fishing and aquaculture and tourism; Hamilton City in non-food manufacturing and services related to being a regional centre. Overall the Waikato regional economy has a similar level of diversity to the national economy.

Industry	Waikato region	Hamilton	Hauraki	Matamata-Piako	Ōtorohanga	South Waikato	Taupō	Thames-Coromandel	Waikato District	Waipā	Waitomo	NZ
Agriculture	8.4	0.5	15.4	20.1	31.7	18.2	7.3	4.9	13.5	13.1	16.1	3.6
Mining	2.9	0.1	22.7	0.6	0.7	0.0	2.7	0.2	8.6	0.1	19.0	1.0
Forestry & logging	1.0	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.6	6.2	4.2	0.7	1.2	0.2	1.1	0.6
Other primary	1.2	0.4	1.5	1.7	3.3	2.5	1.6	2.8	3.4	1.8	2.4	1.0
Food manufacture	3.5	1.7	2.1	12.0	0.2	7.9	0.9	1.8	3.5	5.0	7.7	2.2
Other manufacture	6.9	7.9	3.5	6.6	6.7	16.2	4.6	5.8	5.9	5.7	2.1	7.0
Construction	7.4	7.3	5.4	6.9	4.9	3.9	7.2	10.1	9.2	8.7	4.2	6.6
Rental, hiring & real estate	6.6	5.3	6.4	6.1	5.3	5.6	8.9	11.1	7.6	8.0	3.8	6.6
Healthcare & social assistance	6.6	10.3	6.1	2.7	2.0	4.0	3.8	8.2	2.9	4.5	1.9	6.2
Prof, scientific & tech services	6.2	8.6	3.2	3.7	3.6	2.4	5.2	4.6	4.7	6.7	1.9	8.8
Retail trade	5.2	5.2	4.2	5.0	3.8	3.5	6.0	9.0	2.3	5.6	2.7	5.2
Wholesale trade	3.9	5.6	1.8	4.1	2.0	1.2	2.2	2.0	2.7	4.3	1.0	5.1
Utilities	4.9	6.3	0.6	0.4	0.7	1.0	10.5	1.8	4.2	2.9	10.8	2.7
Public admin & safety	4.0	5.6	2.4	1.6	10.3	2.0	3.4	2.7	3.8	1.8	2.5	4.8
Education & training	3.8	4.7	3.2	2.6	2.6	3.5	2.8	3.1	3.3	3.8	2.3	3.6
Finance & insurance services	2.5	3.6	1.6	2.7	0.8	1.1	1.7	2.3	0.8	2.7	1.0	5.7
Transport, postal & warehousing	2.2	1.9	1.2	3.0	2.6	2.2	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.4	1.4	3.5
Accommodation & food services	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.2	0.8	1.0	4.9	4.5	1.1	1.5	1.2	2.0
Other services	1.5	1.6	1.2	1.5	1.0	1.9	1.6	1.8	1.2	1.8	0.7	1.7
Information, media and telecoms	1.4	2.7	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.4	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.4	3.7
Admin & support services	1.2	1.7	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.4	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.3	1.7
Arts & recreation services	1.2	1.0	0.5	1.1	0.6	0.4	1.5	1.6	1.0	1.9	2.3	1.2
Other[b]	15.6	16.3	14.0	15.2	14.9	14.5	15.0	16.3	15.1	15.8	13.2	15.5
Economic concentration index[c]	21.3	35.4	93.3	50.2	102	50.2	31.1	31.7	29.1	29.1	77.5	22.8

Source: Infometrics Ltd.

Figure 21: Industry makeup of the Waikato Region in 2021 (% of economy by industry)[88]

Note green shaded cells show those industries that make a relatively high contribution to the local economy.

[88] Waikato Regional Council 2022. The economy of the Waikato region in 2022. TR 2022/17. Page 7. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

The primary sectors contribute the bulk of international exports from the region, with more than 80% coming from the dairy, meat, forest products and horticulture sector. Collectively, the Waikato Region provides 13% of New Zealand's exports of goods and services – well above its share of national GDP.

The region also has high GDP from utilities (particularly the Waikato hydroelectric and geothermal electricity generation), construction, healthcare and social assistance, and education and training (including major healthcare and tertiary education institutions). However, services make up only 48% of regional GDP, compared to 60% for New Zealand as a whole.

The eight dams and nine power stations of the Waikato River scheme provide a significant share of New Zealand's electricity, including up to 25% of daily peak supply. The region is home to the majority of New Zealand's geothermal energy infrastructure, which, as well as direct uses of geothermal heat, is a major contributor to the national electricity supply.

Another important component of infrastructure activity is the production of the heavy and civil engineering construction sector, which was estimated to be around $525 million in the Waikato Region in 2021, or around 2% of total regional GDP.

Marine farming has become an important industry in the Waikato region in the last few decades. The Waikato region produced $91.6 million in aquaculture exports in 2023 and is 17% of the total export value of the New Zealand aquaculture industry. There are over 450 marine farms in the region. The Coromandel area accounts for 22% of New Zealand's oyster farming and 28% of mussels. It is estimated that aquaculture directly contributes 7.2% of GDP for the Thames-Coromandel District in 2017 or around $70 million per annum.

Coastal tourism is also locally important for much of the region bordering the Hauraki Gulf and for other west coast centres such as Raglan in the Waikato District. Tourism accounted for an estimated 14% of Thames Coromandel District GDP in 2020.

The Māori economy is a growing force in the Waikato region. It is estimated that Māori assets in the region, up to 2022, have a value of $14.7 billion. However, Māori-owned businesses tend to be less profitable, with indicative margins of 90% of those of non-Māori businesses. In terms of education, the percentage of Māori school leavers is 67% compared to 79% overall.

Key Māori economy statistics

Indicator	Estimate date	Number	Share of Waikato	Share of NZ
Population	2021	124,6700	25%	17%
Under 15	2021	40,170	39%	27%
Working age (15-64)	2021	76,010	24%	16%
65 and over	2021	8,490	10%	7%
Employment[a]	2022	50,500	19%	14%
Unemployment[b]	2022	6.8%	3.9%	3.4%
Average annual earnings	2021	$54,700	88%	83%
Māori-owned businesses	2020	1,191	11%	8%
Assets **Total**	2014	**$6.2bn**		
Businesses of Māori employers	2014	$2.6bn		
Business of self-employed Māori	2014	$0.7bn		
Trusts and other Māori entities	2014	$2.9bn		
GDP	2017	$1.8bn	8.0%	

Sources: Infometrics Ltd; Statistics NZ; Te Puni Kōkiri (2014), Nicholson Consulting Ltd (2022), Te Waka (2019).

[a] Number represents: the number of employed Māori in Waikato; Māori share of employed in Waikato; Māori share of employed in NZ.

[b] Number represents the unemployment rate for: Waikato Māori; all groups in the region; and all groups in NZ.

[c] Businesses where at least 51% of wages paid to directors, partners or active shareholders are to individuals of Māori ethnicity or descent.

Figure 22: Key Maori economy statistics[89]

Labour force participation in the Waikato region is high - the working-age population topped 400,000 in 2022, of which 70% (281,000 people) are actively engaged in the labour market either as workers or unemployed but actively seeking and available for work. However, employers are having difficulty finding and retaining adequate supplies of appropriately skilled labour, with the number of job vacancies well in excess of locally available labour, particularly in Taupō, Hamilton, Waipā and Matamata-Piako. Te Waka, which was the region's economic development agency until its closure in 2024, reported 71% of surveyed businesses identified skills shortages as a problem, with construction, agriculture, hospitality and manufacturing reporting the most acute shortages.

Hamilton is the region's primary hub for employment, consumption and innovation, with the number of jobs in the Hamilton area having grown from 122,500 to 169,050 between 2013 and 2023 (+38%), while employment in the rest of the Waikato Region has grown only half as much (+19%) in that period. Hamilton attracts a significant number of commuters from surrounding towns and rural areas. Many people commute from outside the city to work, with around 34% of workers living in the Waikato District commuting to Hamilton for work, as well as 13% of workers living in Morrinsville, 24% of workers living in Cambridge, and 19% of workers living in Te Awamutu.

Unemployment in the region is low, reflected by the proportion of work-ready people on Jobseeker Support benefits. Much of the region is similar to the national rate of 2.1% but it is lower in districts such as Waipā and Matamata-Piako and slightly higher in district such as South Waikato, Hamilton and Waitomo.

The 2018 New Zealand Index of Multiple Deprivation identified that the Waikato region has higher than average deprivation, with the median rank in the Waikato region being 13.9%[90] worse than New Zealand overall. South Waikato in particular is ranked as one of 12 most deprived districts in the North Island, indicating severe socio-economic hardship. Waitomo, Hauraki, Rotorua-Lakes and Hamilton city also have above average levels of deprivation.

Household incomes have increased at an average of 2.3% per annum over the past 20 years, in some cases reflecting rising wages and in others reflecting household members working more, perhaps as a response to rising cost of living.

	Waikato region	Hamilton	Hauraki	Matamata-Piako	Ōtorohanga	South Waikato	Taupō	Thames-Coromandel	Waikato District	Waipā	Waitomo	NZ
Median household incomes ($000s)	90.1	94.5	68.0	89.1	87.9	73.8	85.3	65.6	112.1	103.6	73.8	92.0
Median personal incomes ($000s)	30.4	30.2	24.6	32.4	30.2	24.9	30.3	24.9	34.7	35.5	27.3	31.8
Med. personal incomes ages 15-29	17.5	17.0	16.7	22.6	18.6	15.6	18.4	16.7	16.7	18.7	18.3	17.2
30-64	43.6	44.2	35.4	44.6	40.0	37.3	42.1	34.2	47.7	50.0	37.1	45.3
65+	22.4	22.5	20.9	22.5	23.2	21.0	23.1	22.1	22.6	23.2	22.3	22.5
Med. personal incomes Europeans	32.7	34.2	24.7	33.4	33.5	26.4	32.2	25.0	37.6	36.4	30.6	34.5
($ 000) Māori	23.4	23.0	22.6	25.2	20.7	21.7	24.0	23.0	23.8	28.0	22.2	24.3
Pacific	23.3	22.8	21.3	26.2	17.8	21.2	24.8	23.9	25.5	28.4	26.7	24.3
Asians	28.3	26.6	26.2	31.4	32.7	30.6	33.7	29.3	32.4	29.1	33.0	28.4

Source: Statistics NZ.

[a] Shaded cells represent figures 10 percent or more higher than the New Zealand equivalent.

[b] Ethnic groups do not add up to 100 percent, since some people will identify with more than one group.

Figure 23: Incomes across the Waikato Region.[91]

[89] Waikato Regional Council 2022. The economy of the Waikato region in 2022. TR 2022/17. Page 4. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

[90] Waikato Regional Council 2021. Socio-economic deprivation in the Waikato Region. TR 2021/14. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/WRC-2019/TR202114.pdf

[91] Waikato Regional Council 2022. The economy of the Waikato region in 2022. TR 2022/17. p.19. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

Housing affordability is a key issue for the Waikato region. The median sales price of dwellings increased to over $770,000 in the region in 2024, which is an annual growth rate of over 8% per annum. Thames-Coromandel District has a house price-income ratio of 17.2, making it one of the most severely unaffordable housing markets in the country (although demand in this District is also derived from Auckland).

Only 64% of households in the region own their own homes – the third lowest rate in the country. Home ownership in Hamilton, at 54%, is the lowest in the country. In the renting market, 88% of property is owned by private landlords, 8% by state housing and the rest from a mixture of local government, iwi and other community providers. Rent-income ratios are more than 10% higher than the national average in the Thames-Coromandel, Waikato, and Hauraki districts, and 10% lower in the South Waikato District in 2022.

According to the Ministry of Social Development, there are around 40,000 recipients of the Accommodation Supplement in the Waikato region, equivalent to 21% of households. This varies across the region from as low as 14% in the Waipā District, to 26% in Hamilton and 30% in South Waikato. Hamilton City has a much higher level of public housing tenancies (5.4% of households) than the rest of the region while South Waikato District has only 0.4%, although this is more a reflection on supply over demand where the number of applicants for public housing is 300% of the existing number of tenancies.

Mid-range population projections suggest the need for 2,500 new houses per year in the region for the next 20 years, while the 'high' projections indicate the need for 3,800 per year.

Affordability[a]	Waikato region	Hamilton	Hauraki	Matamata-Piako	Ōtorohanga	South Waikato	Taupō	Thames-Coromandel	Waikato District	Waipā	Waitomo	NZ
House prices-income ratio (2017)	6.1	6.6	5.7	5.0	3.1	2.4	5.6	12.4	6.4	5.4	2.3	6.8
House prices-income ratio (2022)	8.6	8.4	8.4	7.2	6.2	4.2	9.4	17.2	7.5	7.5	4.7	8.8
Land value as % of capital value (2022)		53%	48%	51%	51%	40%	52%	59%	53%	53%	35%	45%
Rents as % of income (2017)	21.7%	21.7%	23.9%	19.7%	14.3%	12.4%	21.3%	28.7%	24.6%	19.8%	16.2%	21.8%
Rents as % of income (2022)	22.4%	21.3%	25.4%	22.2%	20.1%	15.3%	23.7%	33.2%	24.6%	21.3%	19.9%	22.1%
Housing quality[b]												
% living in overcrowded homes (2018)	10%	14%	8%	7%	9%	14%	8%	6%	11%	5%	16%	
% living in damp homes (2018)	25%	26%	27%	26%	29%	32%	21%	20%	25%	21%	33%	
% living in mouldy homes (2018)	21%	22%	23%	21%	21%	27%	16%	15%	20%	17%	28%	
Housing tenure												
Home ownership (including family trusts) (2018)	64%	54%	69%	66%	63%	63%	66%	73%	71%	71%	60%	65%
No. on Accom. Supplement/households (2022)	21%	26%	21%	17%	16%	30%	18%	16%	21%	14%	20%	19%
Public housing tenancies/households (2021)	2.6%	5.4%	1.2%	1.2%	0.9%	0.4%	1.1%	1.4%	1.4%	1.1%	2.5%	
Applicants/tenancies (2021)	53%	48%	60%	57%	103%	297%	87%	44%	62%	43%	57%	
Public housing tenancies (2021)	4,834	3,379	107	168	36	38	173	206	394	239	94	
Emergency housing approvals (2021)	5,028	3,663	143	119	20	110	584	107	104	161	17	
Annual increase in public housing applicants (2018-2021)	52%	55%	45%	60%	74%	54%	38%	46%	42%	54%	50%	

Sources: Statistics NZ, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Waikato Housing Initiative, Infometrics Ltd.

[a] Green shaded cells represent figures 10 percent or more lower (more affordable) than the New Zealand equivalent; orange shaded cells represent figures 10 percent or more higher (less affordable) than the New Zealand.

[b] Green shaded cells represent figures 10 percent or more lower (ie there are fewer living in poor quality houses) than the regional average; orange shaded cells represent figures 10 percent or more higher (ie there are more living in poor quality houses) than the regional equivalent.

Figure 24: Housing in the Waikato Region.[92]

For commercial activities, the average price per square metre of land has increased by almost seven percent per annum between 2014 and 2024, with this being even higher in Waipā, Taupō and Thames-Coromandel. For industrial activity the average price per square metre of land increased by five percent per annum between 2014 and 2024, with the same districts being most affected.

Intra-regional trade flows of the region highlight Hamilton City's position as the central economic hub, with strong intra-regional trade and significant linkages to surrounding districts. Waikato District is a key contributor to the regional economy, reflecting its agricultural base and proximity to Hamilton, and Waipā and Matamata-Piako Districts are essential nodes in the region's agricultural supply chains. Taupō District stands out as a largely self-contained economy with limited integration into regional trade networks.

[92] Waikato Regional Council 2022. The economy of the Waikato region in 2022. TR 2022/17. p.22. https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202217.pdf

		To:						Total Regional Exports
		Waikato District	Hamilton City	Waipa District	Matamata Piako District	Taupo District	Rest of Waikato	
From:	Waikato District	3,648	374	102	152	30	106	764
	Hamilton City	866	10,472	363	290	322	545	2,386
	Waipa District	171	242	2,418	168	41	150	773
	Matamata-Piako District	156	359	142	892	45	320	1,022
	Taupo District	69	181	61	72	1,750	91	475
	Rest of Waikato	262	450	193	368	71	3,388	1,345
	Total Regional Imports	1,524	1,606	862	1,050	509	1,212	

Large values are set against darker green fill, the smallest values against white

Figure 25: Estimated economic flows within the Waikato Region ($m NZD) 2023[93]

[93] Gordon M, Foy D, Yeoman R. 2025. Waikato Region Economic Geographies Profiles. Prepared by Formative Limited for the Waikato Regional Council, February 2025. Document # 31452260.

Appendix 4: Waikato Regional Council policy context

Strategic priorities and associated plans, policies and work programmes

Water

WRC seeks to achieve clean water and healthy aquatic ecosystems that meet iwi aspirations and community needs within environmental limits.

How we manage our environment so our freshwater bodies are healthy is the focus of WRC's current Freshwater Policy Review. This policy review is in response to the Government's directions on how fresh water is managed in New Zealand in order to stop further degradation and improving its quality and ecosystem health.

The Water Security Strategy for the Waikato Region builds on national and local water security initiatives to identify a roadmap for a coordinated regional response to changing water security. It recommends the development of a multi-stakeholder plan to ensure wellbeing and resilience within defined environmental limits for the next 30 years.

Under the Government's Local Water Done Well legislation, councils must choose the best way to deliver water services for their communities. Waikato Water Done Well is a project that has supported participating Waikato councils to identify collective water services challenges and facilitate in co-designing a region-wide water services delivery model. Under Waikato Water Done Well, participating councils would transfer responsibility for their water services to the new organisation that they will collectively own, and have a say in its strategic priorities.

Biodiversity and biosecurity

WRC seeks to achieve people working together to protect and restore our unique local native plants and animals, and the indigenous ecosystems they live in.

A key priority of WRC's current LTP is to invest more in the region's biodiversity, aiming to reverse biodiversity loss by providing funding to more community groups carrying out work to protect and restore the region's unique plants, animals and marine life, and the indigenous ecosystems they live in.

The current National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity requires regional councils to develop a regional biodiversity strategy of which the purpose is to promote the landscape-scale restoration of the region's indigenous biodiversity. As a first step in this process, WRC is leading the development of a Regional Biodiversity Accord as a statement of how regional partners will work together to develop a regional biodiversity strategy. It is likely that information gathered for this RSS can inform a regional biodiversity strategy and vice versa, particularly in terms of biological and physical connections within, and between, the terrestrial environment, water bodies, and the coastal marine area, and areas identified for restoration or increased vegetation cover.

The Waikato and Waipā River Restoration Strategy provides a framework to help with 'on the ground' activities for restoration work, and allows for coordination of efforts. Priority locations and projects have been identified for a wide range of restoration activities related to erosion and sedimentation, water quality, biodiversity, fish, access and recreation and cultural values.
In terms of biosecurity, the Biosecurity Act 1993 enables Waikato Regional Council to develop a regional pest management plan (RPMP) that is specific to the region's needs and communities' expectations. The Waikato RPMP 2022-2032 details which plants and animals are declared

pests in the Waikato region and how each pest will be managed over the life of the RPMP. There are three site-led programmes included in the RPMP - the Hūnua Ranges Pest Management Area, wetlands and Project Yellow. Other pest management programmes are specific to species rather than area.

Coastal and marine

WRC seeks to achieve healthy marine ecosystems that provide us with many benefits like recreation, food, improved water quality, increased resilience to climate change, and sustainable economic opportunities.

Understanding coastal marine areas is a key priority of WRC's current LTP, particularly focussing on coastal water quality monitoring, coastal biodiversity, habitat distribution, and ecosystem health.

Alongside the Regional Coastal Plan, which is currently being replaced, WRC developed a regional Aquaculture Strategy to enable aquaculture growth with an economic lens balanced by community, cultural and environmental wellbeing. The strategy's vision is for the Waikato to be world-class in sustainable and innovative aquaculture management with a doubling of export growth by 2044. To achieve this, overarching priorities of sustainability, resilience and prosperity inform and guide implementation of the strategy.

Sustainable development and infrastructure

WRC seeks to achieve resilient communities that plan for intergenerational wellbeing, develop with nature in mind and are able to respond to and recover from adversity.

Through its LTP, WRC has invested in regional economic development by providing funding to Te Waka from the Regional Development Fund. WRC's Infrastructure Strategy is another LTP priority, recognising that many of the region's resilience assets are coming to the end of their life, need to be replaced or need to be upgraded due to an increase in extreme weather events occurring.

WRC's Sustainable Infrastructure Decision-making Framework, (SIDF) enables Council to make best practice decisions on long-term investments in critical flood protection and drainage assets in ways that balance the needs of communities. The SIDF is used to evaluate various response strategies and their impacts using drafted Strategic Investment Objectives and a multi-criteria analysis that includes economic, social and environmental assessments, and te ao Māori perspectives. The SIDF is an important tool in WRC's Infrastructure Strategy and investment programme.

The Waikato Regional Waste Prevention Action Plan 2020-2025 builds on the earlier Waikato Waste Strategies to prevent waste by implementing circular economy principles with the intention to boost the Waikato region by protecting businesses against scarcity of resources, volatile prices, and supply chains while helping to create new business opportunities.

WRC also participates in adaptation strategy and plan processes across the region. More detail on these is provided in Appendix 5.

Community connections

WRC seeks to achieve vibrant communities that are well connected with each other and to services.

Transport is an important enabler of social, economic and environmental outcomes. WRC works to align transport planning and delivery with land use through the Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP) and the Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP). Integrated planning for transport and land use can reduce congestion and the need for new roads, and support transport choice and higher levels of public transport use.

The RLTP sets out how we intend to develop the region's land transport system over the next 30 years. It also identifies proposed regional transport activities for investment (by local and central government) over the next six years. The RPTP sets out the priorities and needs of public transport services and infrastructure to be delivered in the Waikato over a 10-year period. Both plans contain a spatial element.

Transition to a low emissions economy

WRC seeks to work with others to transition to a competitive low emissions economy that's fair for everyone and enhances community wellbeing for the future.

WRC's Climate Action Roadmap (2023) guides how Council will work with others to support the transition to a climate-resilient, low emissions society that is less vulnerable to disruption, more affordable and better for health and wellbeing. The Roadmap identifies nine pathways, each with a set of council commitments to reduce emissions and adapt to the changes already being experienced. The nine pathways are:

- water
- coastal and marine
- biodiversity and biosecurity
- regional resilience
- energy and industry
- afforestation and planting
- agriculture and soils
- urban form and transport
- community funding and investment.

An inventory of the Waikato region's community-scale greenhouse gas emissions is held every three years. The inventory measures stationary energy (such as electricity, gas, fuels), transportation (on-road fuels), waste, industry and agriculture emissions, along with forestry sequestration. The latest report has a breakdown of the carbon footprint for each territorial authority in the Waikato region. The inventory compares the results with previous inventories and shows how the region is tracking at a national level. The most recent inventory was published in 2023.

In 2024 WRC developed an Energy Inventory[94] as a first step towards a review of the Council's energy strategy for the region that was developed in 2009. The inventory takes a broad approach to the consideration of energy in the region, including addressing renewable electricity generation, storage options and electricity transmission. It also collates information relevant to the demand for energy. The inventory recognises the Waikato as a significant contributor to New Zealand's renewable electricity generation that has the potential to contribute further with increasing interest in developing new energy sources, particularly solar and wind farms, including large offshore wind proposals. It also highlights potential for the region to transition from the use of fossil fuels for heat and transport to a combination of increased renewable electricity and biomass/biofuels and biogas.

Waikato Regional Policy Statement

The significant resource management issues for the Waikato region identified in the RPS are reflective of the types of issues an RSS might address. The issues are:

- **State of resources** - Declining quality and quantity of natural and physical resources impacts their life-supporting capacity, reduces intrinsic values and ecosystem services and in general reduces our ability to provide for our wellbeing.
- **Effects of climate change** - The effects of climate change (including climate variability) may impact our ability to provide for our wellbeing, including health and safety.

[94] Waikato Regional Council 2024. Waikato Regional Energy Inventory. March 2024. Document # 28279632

- **Providing for energy demand** - With increasing demand for energy coupled with Government objectives and targets regarding renewable electricity generation, there is an increasing need for improvements in the way we use energy, and for new energy projects and associated infrastructure, and increasing need to manage potential adverse effects on natural and physical resources.
- **Managing the built environment** - Development of the built environment including infrastructure has the potential to positively or negatively impact on our ability to sustainably manage natural and physical resources and provide for our wellbeing. It is acknowledged that there is a need to keep improving strategic planning for development in order to ensure ongoing development is sustainable.
- **Relationship of tangata whenua with the environment (te taiao)** - The relationship tangata whenua have with the domains of Ranginui and Papatūānuku is of paramount importance and this relationship is being damaged.
- **Health and wellbeing of the Waikato River catchment** - The health and wellbeing of the Waikato River, its major tributary the Waipā River, and their catchments has been and continues to be degraded.

Key RPS provisions that refer to strategic and spatial planning include:

- IM-P1 directs for an integrated approach to resource management to be adopted that takes a long-term strategic approach that recognises the changing environment and changing resource use pressures and trends.
- IM-M12 states WRC will investigate the use of integrated spatial planning tools including to explore alternative long-term development options and associated trade-offs.
- AIR-M3 directs a strategic approach to air quality monitoring.
- CMA-M12 and CE-CMA-M13 signal the desire to see strategic and holistic management of the region's coastal marine area through the development of an aquaculture strategy and coastal marine strategy. These strategies may identifying areas for economic use using spatial planning techniques.
- ECO-M11 directs for the developed of district scale local indigenous biodiversity strategies to determine the broader strategic picture of district-wide indigenous biodiversity maintenance and enhancement.
- HAZ-P1 signals that a strategic approach should be taken to natural hazards that avoids the need and demand for ad hoc responses to natural hazard events and recognises that natural events only pose a problem when people or development are put at risk.
- HAZ-M5 states that WRC will advocate for a strategic approach to development (including redevelopment) that seeks any increase in risk from natural hazards (including residual risk) is minimised.
- HCV-M2 requires the development of a Regional Heritage Inventory that includes the spatial identification of heritage sites.
- UFD-P2 directs for the long-term spatial pattern of land use development to inform future investment in transport infrastructure through the development and maintenance of growth strategies.
- UFD-M6 encourages the use of integrated spatial planning tools to explore future development options and integrate land use planning with infrastructure.
- UFD-M11 directs that regional and district plans shall include provisions that provide for a long-term strategic approach to the integration of land use and infrastructure, particularly referring to transport networks, infrastructure and facilities.
- UFD-M19 indicates a process for strategic planning for infrastructure within the coastal marine area with particular consideration to the connectivity with land-based infrastructure.
- UFD-M27 requires WRC to investigate opportunities for passenger transport corridors through strategic planning.
- UFD-M65 encourages Future Proof partners to collaborate on a blue-green network strategy that involves defining a spatial concept for a blue-green network.

Appendix 5: Territorial authority policy context

Hamilton City Council

LTP 2024-2034

The top priorities of the current HCC LTP are:

- Shaping a central city where people love to be
- Shaping a green city, focusing on
    - restoring natural gully network and biodiversity
    - reducing HCC's carbon footprint
    - encouraging and enabling alternative ways to move safely and quickly around the city.
    - planning the future as a sustainable city.
- Shaping a fun city with lots to do, focusing on
    - developing open community spaces
    - creating new and unique experiences for people
    - hosting city events
    - supporting local events
    - attracting national/international sporting events
- Shaping a city that's easy to live in, focusing on
    - development of connected and safe walkways/ cycleways
    - creation of new neighbourhoods
    - affordable housing options
    - easy access to essential services and supporting community spaces.
- Shaping a city where our people thrive, focusing on
    - fast and efficient transport connections
    - collaboration with regional partners to maximize opportunities
    - economic strength leveraged to ensure Hamilton is known as a great place to work/do business
    - invest in right infrastructure

Hamilton Urban Growth Strategy (HUGS) 2023

HUGS sets out Hamilton city's approach to, and spatial vision for, growth over the next 50 years, including the sequencing of new greenfield growth cells. It sets out the preferred urban form of Hamilton city and future urban land near the city boundaries to guide investment decisions for Council, developers and partners.

HUGS includes information on:

- Demographics and population growth projections
- Economic growth (including projections)
- Housing growth (including projections)
- Transport

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Hamilton City Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Access Hamilton Strategy 2022
- Our Climate Future: Te Pae Tawhiti o Kirikiriroa
- Community and Social Development Strategy 2021-26
- Housing Strategy
- Open Spaces Strategy 2023-2053
- Nature in the City Strategy 2020-2050
- Play Strategy 2019-2039
- Central City Transformation Plan 2021-2051.

Waikato District Council

Enhanced Annual Plan 2024-2025

In February 2024, the Government gave local councils a one-off opportunity to pause work on their 2024-2034 Long Term Plan (LTP) and instead focus on creating a 2024/25 Enhanced Annual Plan. Waikato District Council accepted this offer, and subsequently, will develop a nine-year LTP for 2025–2034. The 2024/25 Enhanced Annual Plan sets out the work they plan to undertake from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, and provides financial statements detailing how the council will pay for it. It is a companion document to the 2021-2031 LTP and sets the following strategic priorities:

- Building community resilience
- Building relationships
- Consistent delivery of core services
- Improving council responsiveness
- Improving connectivity
- Supporting sustainable growth.

Waikato 2070 – Growth and Economic Development Strategy 2020

Waikato 2070 identifies how, where and when growth will occur in the district over the next 50 years to guide future development planning and investments. The strategy was adopted in May 2020. The strategy includes development plans for Tuakau, Pokeno, Mangatawhiri and Mangatangi, Meremere, Mercer and Hampton Downs, Te Kauwhata, Huntly and Ohinewai, Taupiri, Ngāruawāhia, Te Kowhai, Horotiu and Raglan. It provides the indicative extent and timing for future growth cells (subject to further investigation and feasibility) identified on each of the development plans. It is supported by spatial information on the natural environment including rivers, lakes, wetlands, natural areas, high sloped land and LUC class 1-3 soils.

Waikato Blueprint

The Waikato Blueprint provides a high level spatial picture of how the Waikato district could progress over 30 years, addressing the community's social, economic and environmental needs and responding to the wider regional context. The blueprint was developed in 2019 and updated in 2021, and used to inform the 2021-2031 LTP.

The process identified that there is an opportunity to improve the cohesive identity of the district as a whole by strengthening the Waikato River as the element that binds together the key settlements of the district. The blueprint identifies and scales town centres, considering what they provide in terms of office uses, community facilities and social services, industrial and clean production, and environmental initiatives. More specific local area blueprints are also included, providing a snapshot of the key priorities for each area.

Town centre and structure plans

Waikato district's town concept plans and structure plans provide a guiding framework for development of key growth areas to define the future development and land use patterns and the layout and nature of infrastructure, while setting out constraints and key features that influence the effects of development.

Waikato district council has town concept plans and structure plans for

- Ngaaruawaahia, Hopuhopu and Taupiri
- Pokeno
- Tuakau
- Waikato District Blueprint and local area blueprints

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Waikato District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Climate Response and Resilience Strategy 2023-2027
- Connectivity Strategy 2024
- Housing Strategy 2024
- Taiao (Nature) in the Waikato Strategy.

Waipā District Council

Enhanced Annual Plan 2024-2025

While the Council is still working on its new LTP, it consulted on an Enhanced Annual Plan that takes a 'back to basics' approach to the Council's proposed capital works programme. It is primarily focussed on maintaining existing levels of service to the community, renewing council assets, and catering for growth.

The top priorities of the Waipā Enhanced Annual Plan are:

- Roads and footpaths
- Three waters
- Community services
- Support services.

Ahu Ake – Waipā Community Spatial Plan

Ahu Ake is a long-term blueprint for the Waipā District, designed in collaboration with the community and mana whenua. The plan sits above other council strategies and plans and covers a broader range of focus areas, including:

- Placemaking, future development and housing
- Economic development
- Environment
- Transport
- Community spaces
- Heritage, arts and culture, and
- Three waters.

Ahu Ake includes information on:

- Population size and growth
- Employment and GDP
- Settlements and future growth areas
- Significant natural features
- Cultural sites
- Lifeline infrastructure.

Waipā District Council won a top geospatial award in 2022 for its early work on the development of Ahu Ake, specifically for its innovative approach to using GIS modelling and Story Maps to explore what the future of the district could look like.

Waipā 2050 – District Growth Strategy

Waipā has set a direction for growth in its 2050 District Growth Strategy (Waipā 2050), published in 2017. The growth strategy identifies land as being anticipated or required for development either prior to 2035 (stage 1) or post (stage 2) 2035.

Town concept plans for Cambridge, Te Awamutu, Kihikihi, Ohaupo and Pirongia were created based on information from the District Growth Strategy. Each plan contains information on land use and zoning; views and vistas; history and heritage; buildings and streetscape character as well as a profile of the town's character and issues and opportunities specific to that area.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Waipā District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Environmental Strategy
- Infrastructure Strategy.

Matamata Piako District Council

LTP 2024-2034

The LTP identifies four main challenges for MPDC - affordability, compliance, growth and demand, and climate change and resilience.

The top priorities of the current MPDC LTP are:

- Wastewater treatment upgrades for Matamata, Morrinsville, Te Aroha and Tahuna.
- Climate change, prioritising projects including growing climate change knowledge, protecting waterways, increasing drinking water sustainability and developing a climate change strategy.
- Roading renewals including creating new pavements.
- Town centre infrastructure upgrades.
- Additional playgrounds to encourage healthy active communities.

Town strategies

The Matamata-Piako town strategies followed the 2009 Matamata-Piako District Growth Strategy to guide planning and future development of the three main towns in the district – Morrinsville, Matamata and Te Aroha. They provide a spatial framework for the development of each town in terms of the preferred location of future land-uses, and the integration of the land-uses with transport and other infrastructure. Given the strategies were developed in 2013, some of the spatial data and other information contained in the strategy may be outdated, particularly in terms of population data and urban growth, however this type of information is included in the Future Proof Strategy that is more up-to-date. The town strategies provide other information on transportation, infrastructure and greenspace.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Matamata-Piako District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2021-51
- Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plan.

Thames-Coromandel District Council

LTP 2024-2034

Weather events in the Coromandel in 2023 have significantly influenced the priorities of the current TCDC LTP, which has a key focus on resilience and investment in critical infrastructure and repairs and reinforcement of vulnerable areas.

Other top priorities include

- Transport
- Protection of people and the environment
- Stormwater
- Wastewater treatment and disposal.

Thames Spatial Plan 2022

The Thames and Surrounds Spatial is an evidence-based, future-focused 30-plus-year strategy that identifies areas for urban growth in the District. It is an important umbrella project that brings together the district's efforts to accelerate housing growth for Thames with critical shoreline management work to plan for growth whilst protecting from coastal inundation and erosion risks. It includes information on employment led demand projections, housing affordability, climate change risk, landscape constraints and existing and future infrastructure.

Shoreline Management Pathways

The Shoreline Management Pathways project commenced in 2019 to examine the risks to the Coromandel coastline from the effects of sea-level rise. In September 2022, Thames-Coromandel District Council adopted the project outputs, including 138 adaptation pathways. The project is based on coastal hazard and climate change modelling.

In 2023, the Shoreline Management Pathways project won an award at the New Zealand Coastal Society conference.

Community Plans

Thames-Coromandel District Council adopted 10-year community plans for its towns in 2020. The plans were developed to inform decisions on prioritising and funding services and activities through the Long Term Plan process. There are seven community plans for:

- Coromandel-Colville
- Tairua-Pauanui
- Thames
- Mercury Bay Central
- Mercury Bay North
- Mercury Bay South, and
- Whangamatā.

The plans are not spatial but contain population and employment statistics, community facilities and information on community facilities and key issues and opportunities for the towns and areas that align with the four wellbeings.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Thames-Coromandel District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Coastal hazards strategy
- Coastal management strategy
- Coromandel Peninsula Blueprint
- Marine and Harbour Facilities Strategy
- Hauraki-Coromandel Recreational Biking Strategy
- District Sport and Active Recreation Plan
- Sea Change – Tai Timu Tai Pari Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan.

Hauraki District Council

LTP 2024-2034

The current HDC LTP is focused on climate change adaptation planning and implementation of the Zero Carbon Promise. Other top priorities are:

- Flood protection. Stop banks need to be upgraded to provide the community with protection from flooding.
- Earthquake strengthening Waihi Arts and Centre Museum.
- Plans ward upgrades including
    - Plains Community Hub (Library and Service Centre)
    - Western Plains Drainage District stopbank and floodgate renewals
    - Pump track in Hugh Hayward Domain
    - Ngātea new wastewater pump station
    - Ngātea seat installation
    - Raw water mains
- Paeroa ward upgrades including
    - Paeroa wastewater quality and capacity upgrades
    - Railway Reserve rangatahi recreation space
    - Paeroa streetscape (Wharf and Mackay Street)
    - Paeroa Refuse Transfer Station development
    - Raw water mains
    - Training lights for Paeroa Domain
- Biodiversity strategy.

Hauraki District Growth Strategy 2050

The Hauraki District Growth Strategy 2050 was published in 2019. The proposed overall strategic direction for growth in the Hauraki District is to provide for the managed expansion of Waihi, Paeroa and Ngātea and other existing settlements along State Highway 2 through existing greenfield structure plan areas and infill development. The focus of the remaining rural and coastal settlements will be to accommodate growth within their existing areas. The strategy is to be implemented through the District Plan and Long Term Plan.

Wharekawa Coast 2120

The Wharekawa Coast 2120 project started in 2018 and sought to consider and plan for the future of the Wharekawa Coast (Kaiaua, Pūkorokoro/Miranda, Waharau) area within the Hauraki District. This project sought to respond to multiple hazards risks including freshwater flooding, coastal erosion and coastal inundation.

Hauraki District Council partnered with Waikato Regional Council and Waikato District Council to develop the Wharekawa Coast 2120 Community Plan that was adopted in 2023. It is a community plan to provide an adaptive pathway to ensure a safe and resilient future for communities living on the Wharekawa Coast. It is primarily based on natural hazard risk information but also includes information on land use, the natural environment and the built environment and cultural and community facilities.

Hauraki Plains Adaptation Plan

The Hauraki Plains Adaptation Plan is a long-term adaptive planning project for natural hazards in the wider Hauraki District that began in 2024. An up-to-date hazard assessment for the Hauraki Plains is still underway but work to-date includes spatial representation of:

- Land cover classifications – pasture, wetland, indigenous and exotic forest, DOC land
- Flood protection and drainage infrastructure
- Community and cultural infrastructure, facilities and sites
- Population data.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Hauraki District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Community Placemaking Plans
- Land Transport Procurement Strategy
- Sport and Active Recreation Plan
- Tourism Strategy
- Zero Carbon Promise.

South Waikato District Council

LTP

The LTP has a focus on thriving communities, a sustainable environment and a robust economy. It sets five goals that provide direction across all activity and service areas:

1. More people own their own home than ever before
2. More people participate in community activities and events than ever before
3. No waste or rubbish leaves the District
4. Our economy grows faster than anywhere else in the country
5. All our young people are in education or employment.

South Waikato Growth Plan 2024-2054

The South Waikato Growth Plan was consulted on in 2023 and eventually formed part of the Council's 2024 LTP. It provides a blueprint for the future land use and development of the district's main towns of Tokoroa, Putāruru and Tirāu over a 30-year period.

The plan is guided by population projections and a Housing and Business Capacity Assessment 2023. It identifies that the South Waikato district has experienced a changing population trend over the last two decades; shifting from a declining population to one experiencing steady

growth. Population projections for the next 30 years show a high degree of variance based on different growth scenarios; therefore, the plan provides a range of options for growth if population trends continue. The plan also identifies housing affordability as a significant issue in the South Waikato district, due to factors such as average incomes, average house prices and rents and the cost of developing new homes and provides additional development capacity to respond to this.

The Growth Plan provides for a combination of greenfield and infill development options for housing and business land, with an emphasis on additional greenfield development opportunities. The plan also considers future infrastructure provision and upgrades required to support the identified growth areas for the three towns.

Town concept plans

South Waikato District Council also prepared town concept plans for Tokoroa, Putāruru and Tirāu alongside the Growth Plan 2024-2054, to provide further detail on specific actions and projects for the future development of the three towns.

The consultation document for the current LTP proposed that, over the next three years, implementation of the town concept plans would be limited to completing key assessments and studies, identifying key partners, finalising designs and costs and putting together a comprehensive funding plan.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other South Waikato District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Asset Management Plans – Facilities, Landfill, Stormwater, Transportation, Wastewater and Water Supply.

Ōtorohanga District Council

LTP 2024-2034

Climate change is a key focus of the current ODC LTP. A key priority is to develop a climate change response plan to provide a pathway to better cope with extreme weather events, helping communities to respond and plan.

Other top priorities include:

- A community van to be used for library services and emergency events, among other things.
- Roading maintenance and renewal of culverts, bridges and footpaths.
- Waste management and minimisation.
- Flood control, including work on seawalls and stopbanks.
- Housing, including a review of elderly housing and investigations to improve housing affordability.

Town concept plans

Ōtorohanga District Council developed a suite of concept plan documents to provide a framework for investment across the district over the short, medium and long term.

The Ōtorohanga Town Concept Plan was the first town concept plan to be prepared for the district in 2022. It is considered a small-scale spatial plan with the intention of planning for growth.

A key map that forms the environmental basis for the plan summarises the biophysical constraints and opportunities of the Ōtorohanga Ward and surrounding landscape. It spatially shows the underlying landform, waterways and riparian corridors, existing areas of vegetation, the productive potential of soils, steep and erodible slopes, overland flow paths, and areas affected by flooding – overall showing which areas are more suitable for development.

The plan also includes a map that presents a potential ecological network for Ōtorohanga to restore the ecological function of the streams, improve landscape connectivity and protect and enhance biodiversity. It is composed of ecological corridors along streams and roads to link areas of ecological significance and between green spaces and patches of dense, multilayered forest large enough to support a range of habitats for native wildlife.

The Rural Ōtorohanga Concept Plan was adopted in 2024. This plan is less about planning for growth, with the purpose to identify spatial outcomes and opportunities for investment in rural Ōtorohanga that can help improve the liveability of rural communities. It includes information primarily relating to the natural environment, community facilities and cultural sites, as well as information on natural hazards and climate change, and access to infrastructure and utilities.
The Kāwhia, Aotea and Ōpārau Concept Plan was adopted in 2024. The plan reflects a high significance to Mana Whenua, being the resting place of the Tainui Waka and includes cultural spatial information at the forefront.

Other information contained across the town concept plans that may be useful for this RSS inventory include:

- Transport – traffic, roading, walking, cycling
- Population projections
- Land use zoning.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Ōtorohanga District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Asset management plans – Land Transport, Drainage Wastewater and Stormwater, and Water Supply.

Waitomo District Council

LTP 2024-2034

Climate change, including extreme weather events, change in annual rainfall, sea level rise and storm surges, is a key concern influencing the current Waitomo LTP. Other top priorities include:

- Wastewater, particularly Te Kuiti reticulation renewals.
- Water supply, particularly the Te Kuiti resilience project.
- Stormwater network improvements.
- Road and footpath renewals.
- Bridge and culverts renewal programme.

Town concept plans

Town Concept Plans were prepared in 2019 for:

- Maniaiti/Benneydale
- Mokau
- Piopio
- Te Kūiti, and
- Waitomo Caves Village.

The plans were developed with each community and outline key moves for each town and actions and priorities for implementation over 15 years. They contain spatial information including:

- Land use zoning and proposed rezoning and possible future development areas
- Key areas of activity and nodes
- Transport infrastructure
- Public spaces and community facilities
- Topography and natural environment features
- Areas of opportunity for enhancement – infrastructure and natural environment.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Waitomo District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Infrastructure Strategy
- Water Safety Plans – Piopio and Benneydale Drinking Water Supply
- Economic Development Strategy – Waitomo District: Prepared for the Future
- Waitomo District Housing Strategy 2023.

Rotorua-Lakes District Council

LTP 2024-2034

The current RLDC LTP sets nine key outcomes relating to:

- Connected and resilient
- Employment & economy
- Housing
- Active
- Safety
- mana whenua aspirations
- tourism
- environment, and
- arts & culture.

Top priorities include:

- Increase funding for RotoruaNZ to support the delivery of a plan to promote Rotorua and rebuild its reputation.
- Renew and upgrade wastewater assets to meet current demand and future growth expectations.
- Maintain stormwater assets through a proactive regime of planned condition surveys to improve understanding about the state of assets, ensuring stability, reliability and safety.
- Transport infrastructure maintenance and implementation of targeted road safety programmes.
- Public water supplies, including asset condition surveys, underground pipe break analysis and development of risk-based renewal programmes.
- Community funding for partnerships agreement and neighbouring matching fund.

Rotorua Future Development Strategy 2023

The Rotorua Future Development Strategy (FDS) is a long-term roadmap for the development of a well-functioning urban environment in Rotorua that ensures the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of the community. The FDS replaced the 2018 Rotorua Spatial Plan and sets the direction on how and where growth will happen in Rotorua over the next 30 years.

The geographic scope of the FDS is focused on the urban area and surrounds (core study area) within the Rotorua catchment, which means it largely does not apply to the portion of the district that falls within the Waikato region. However, some of the information gathered for the FDS extends beyond the urban area and so contains some relevant information for this RSS, including:

- Conservation land and reserves
- Geothermal fields
- Significant natural areas
- Fault avoidance zone.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Rotorua-Lakes District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Climate Action Plan
- Economic Development Strategy

- Strategy for Homes and Thriving Communities
- Pārekareka, A Play, Active Recreation and Sport Strategy
- Sustainable Living Strategy.

Taupō District Council

LTP 2024-2034

The key priorities for the current TDC LTP are:

- Transport
    - Renewals of district roads that need them
    - Keeping on top of potholes and road maintenance
    - Improving our walking and cycling networks
    - More frequent buses
- Housing
    - Council has zoned significant land to support growth and development
    - Improving community housing
    - Upgrading housing for elderly units
    - Finding ways to help people into affordable homes
- Environment
    - Resilience focus
    - Focus on reducing waste
    - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
    - Keeping new buildings out of high-risk flood areas
    - Strong forward plan to manage foreshore erosion of lakefront reserves for the long term
- Water
    - Significant investment to keep water and wastewater pipes in good condition.
    - Ensuring water infrastructure is built in time to service new houses.
    - Major upgrades to water and wastewater treatment plants to ensure drinking water is safe and to protect the environment.
    - Continue cleaning up stormwater before it flows into the lakes and waterways.
    - Working with iwi to address cultural concerns around wastewater management.

Taupō District 2050 – Growth Management Strategy

Taupō 2050 was adopted in 2006 and reviewed and replaced in 2018. It outlines where Taupō District Council anticipates future urban growth to occur and the nature and scale of such growth.

The strategy relies on information such as:

- Demographic projections
- Urban zoning
- Anticipated capacity and demand for development.

Taupō District Council is currently reviewing its growth strategy and updating it to better align with the NPS-UD requirements of a Future Development Strategy. The projections have been updated and extended out to 2060. It considers how future housing needs, carrying capacity of network infrastructure, tāngata whenua aspirations, and the natural environment are looked at holistically to ensure sustainable and effective growth.

Other relevant plans and strategies

Other Taupō District Council strategies and plans that may be relevant to an RSS include:

- Climate Change Strategy
- Economic Development Strategy
- Erosion and Flood Strategy
- Housing Strategy

- Infrastructure Strategy
- Recreation and Sport Strategy
- Stormwater Strategy
- Transport Strategy
- Water Supply Strategy
- Asset Management Plans – Parks and Recreation, Property, Solid Waste, Stormwater, Transport, Wastewater and Water.

Appendix 6: Key issues and goals identified in iwi management plans

Topic / theme	Key issues and goals
Water	• Water quality supports healthy ecosystem functioning. • Rivers are swimmable and support healthy kai; headwaters of streams safe to drink. • Majestic nature and essence of upper Waikato River treasured as a significant feature, and pristine headwaters protected. • Vegetated riparian margins should be reinstated/water body edges are fully restored with natives. • Wetlands are precious and need to be protected and reinstated. • Identify areas where development activities should be prohibited to protect water resource values, including wetlands. • Aquatic habitats enhanced and restored to support healthy and sustainable fisheries. • Identify locations of additional fisheries monitoring sites. • Identify areas to enable or enhance access to and along waterways. • Water allocation regimes recognise and provide for Māori values and interests and contribute to achievement of cultural and environmental outcomes. • Water storage for more water available for use without affecting low flows.
Geothermal	• Unique geothermal surface features and plants known by iwi should be mapped and prioritised. • Preserve remaining valuable surface features across all geothermal fields and avoid effects on significant sites.
Cultural sites	• Wāhi tapu and wāhi tūpuna are identified and protected. • No further loss or degradation of wāhi tapu, marae and significant sites through flooding, land subsidence, earthworks, or development. • Maintain, enhance and enable access to significant sites. • Culture, history and identity associated with specific places reflected in development.
Biodiversity	• Indigenous biodiversity is maintained, restored, enhanced, and protected. • Forest areas managed for biodiversity as well as economic purposes.
Climate	• Local reduction in emissions. • Climate stable for future generations. • Encourage reforestation and energy efficient practices to offset effects of climate change. • Existing land use, activities, and structures in zones where natural hazards occur are encouraged to change land use or activities and shift, abandon or suitably modify structures to withstand the potential effect of a natural hazard event.
Coast	• Māori interests in coastal and marine areas and activities, particularly related to historical, spiritual, cultural, and traditional values, recognised and given effect. • Marine cultural heritage recognised and provided for. • Marine biodiversity is protected, or preferably enhanced. • Protect and restore coast, beach and estuarine habitats and ecosystems.
Land	• Land use prioritises the protection and restoration of the mauri of land and its resources. • Minimise erosion and soil degradation or loss as a result of land development and use.

	• Land use and activities avoid areas that may be at risk of significant damage from natural hazards. • Identify areas that are eroding badly and where localised engineering works are required to stabilise major earthflows. • Ensure all relevant information regarding hazards is available. • Protect and restore peatlands.
Infrastructure	• Transport networks reduce costs and impacts on the environment through improved energy efficiency. • Promote local scale infrastructure that develops local resilience. • Electricity is sourced and distributed locally wherever practicable. • Large transmission structures shall not be located in close proximity to marae, culturally or spiritually sensitive sites, or in the river and its environs (such as banks, floodplains, estuaries, or bed). • Identify areas within the rohe at the strategic scale where development activities are restricted.

Appendix 7: Community outcomes

Each council within the Waikato region sets community outcomes as part of its vision, in consultation with the respective community. These community outcomes highlight what is important across the region and what an RSS might seek to achieve.

Local authority area	Community outcomes
Waikato Region	• Healthy environment - A resilient and sustainable region that works in harmony with the natural environment, one that's actively transitioning to net carbon zero and fosters the growing of our indigenous biodiversity. • Vibrant communities - A connected and inclusive community where our people are actively engaged with whānau and families, communities and governance. A region with a vibrant Māori culture and one that celebrates diversity, participation and understanding. • Strong economy – An innovation leader with a diversified economy that attracts people to the region and builds their capabilities.
Hamilton City	• A city that's easy to live in • A city where our people thrive • A central city where people love to be • A fun city with lots to do • A green city.
Waikato District	• Cultural - We celebrate who we are - We celebrate all cultures. We treasure our diverse communities, and acknowledge our cultural rights and obligations. We honour, understand and implement Te Tiriti o Waitangi and acknowledge the relationship with mana whenua of our district. • Economic - We support local prosperity - We champion sustainable growth in our local economy. We support local enterprise and encourage innovation and socio-economic prosperity for all, while managing regulatory processes to protect and promote our unique district. We acknowledge our rural and Maaori economies as key contributors to our district's prosperity and sustainability. • Environmental - Our environmental health underpins the health of our people - We want waterways that are healthy and create connections. We protect and enhance our soils, water and native biodiversity and take care of our Taiao (natural environment) for the health and wellbeing of our people, our communities and for future generations. • Social - We have well connected communities - Our communities are connected, safe, accessible and resilient. We put community wellbeing at the heart of our decisions, and we embrace partnerships to get things done to improve people's lives.
Waipā District	• Socially resilient - He aha te mea nui o te ao? Māku e kī atu he tangata, he tangata, he tangata! – it's all about people. o Waipā is a great place to live, work, play and invest o We invest in hauora and support the great work community groups do o Waipā provides a high quality of life for current and future generations • Cultural champions – Promoting our culture and heritage. o We champion the unique history of Waipā o We have a high level of cultural awareness o We partner with tangata whenua o We respect the cultural diversity in our district • Environmental Champions – Protecting and sustaining our environment. o Environmental awareness and responsibility is promoted within the community o We support programmes that promote environmental sustainability o We are responsive to climate change • Economically progressive – Supporting a thriving, sustainable economy.

	○ We have financially sustainable decision making and work programmes ○ We provide new infrastructure as an economic stimulus for our district ○ Our services provide excellent value for money ○ We actively promote our district to enable development, employment and business opportunities ○ Waipā is a great place to invest and do business
Matamata-Piako District	• A place with people at its heart ○ Be the connector between community, iwi, NGOs and government agencies. ○ Prioritise community grants that enhance placemaking. ○ Create vibrant, welcoming town centres. ○ Strive for liveable, accessible, connected neighbourhoods. • A place to thrive ○ Seek opportunities to realise Matamata-Piako's economic potential. ○ Support and encourage quality, sustainable and varied development. ○ Invest in the right infrastructure at the right time. • A place that embraces our environment ○ Educate and exemplify continuous improvement in waste minimisation. ○ Create and maintain green and natural open spaces. ○ Demonstrate and advocate for climate friendly and community resilient initiatives. • A place to belong and create ○ Genuine partnerships with mana whenua. ○ Partner and plan for multi-purpose sporting, cultural and community hubs. ○ Support arts and heritage as an important part of our communities.
Thames-Coromandel District	• A vibrant district | He takiwā hihiri ○ The Coromandel Peninsula is a desirable place to live, work and play. ○ Our district has thriving, resilient communities. ○ We support and encourage culturally diverse and inclusive communities. • A sustainable district | He takiwā toitū ○ The Coromandel Peninsula's natural and built environments are managed sustainably and provide a unique sense of place. ○ We recognise and celebrate the vital role our natural environment plays in supporting well-being in the District. • A connected district | He takiwā tuia ○ Our communities are supported through accessible infrastructure and services. ○ We use our influence and networks to advocate for our communities. ○ We recognise our relationships and partnerships with the District's iwi and will work towards ensuring they are enduring, effective and valued.
Hauraki District	• Healthy environment | Te Mauri o te Taiao ○ Ecosystems are protected, restored and respected. ○ We minimise waste. ○ Our rivers, streams and wetlands are healthy and we use water carefully. ○ We reduce our carbon footprint to minimise climate change. • Connected people | Tūhono ○ We look after each other. ○ We are partners with iwi. ○ We collaborate with other local authorities, and central government. ○ Youth are engaged and supported. ○ We're proud to live here. • Vibrant and safe communities | Te Oranga pai o te Hapori ○ Public spaces are fun and inviting. ○ Everyone has access to safe, healthy, and affordable homes.

	○ Roads and bridges are safe and well-maintained. ○ We have a reliable drinking water supply. ○ We plan for and adapt to the effects of climate change. • Strong economy | Oranga Ōhanga ○ Local business is supported – we can get what we need locally. ○ There is opportunity for paid work and employment, and training. ○ We are skilled and educated.
South Waikato District	• Thriving communities - Our diverse people are healthy and well, with ample opportunities to support their quality of life. • Sustainable environment - The District is a national leader in benefitting from a circular economy. • Robust economy - Leveraging our location and rich soils, we rebuilt a strong foundation for our grandchildren.
Ōtorohanga District	• People - Connected, empowered, engaged communities • Place - Sustainable, resilient district • Partnerships - Aspirational, united, responsible leadership. Progressive, enduring, supportive partnerships for district wellbeing.
Waitomo District	• A prosperous district - We enable a thriving and sustainable economy to create greater benefits for everyone. • A district for all people - Our district is a great place to live because it is accessible, safe, affordable, and inclusive. We promote health, wellbeing, and participation. • A district that cares for its environment - We ensure the wise use and management of all land and resources, now and for future generations. • A district that values culture - We value the whakapapa of our district, and we promote cultural, creative, and recreational activities where traditions, heritage and arts are celebrated.
Rotorua Lakes District	• Active - The accessibility of our lakes, forests, open space networks and the quality of our facilities create opportunities for everyone to be active throughout their lives. • Safety - Our communities, businesses and visitors feel safe across our district. • Tangata whenua aspirations - We recognise and support the aspirations of Tangata Whenua and Mana Whenua and partner to grow economic and social opportunities and benefits for everyone. • Housing - All residents have access to a range of housing options that ensures they can live in quality, homes that are safe and healthy. • Employment and economy - We enable businesses to grow with confidence through increasing investment opportunities. There are employment options across a range of sector. • Tourism - We are a world class destination, with a vibrant inner city and a positive reputation. • Environment – mauri taiao - We are committed to protecting and improving our lakes, waterways, forest and green space environments. • Connected and resilient - Our communities are cohesive and prepared for the effects of climate change and natural hazards and we invest in safe and reliable infrastructure. • Arts and culture - Rotorua's unique cultural identity is the foundation for attracting and delivering a diverse range of events, increasing activity and vibrancy and driving economic benefits.
Taupō District	• Tangata whenua are acknowledged and respected ○ We acknowledge tangata whenua and their ancestral connection to the whenua, ngā maunga and ngā wai. ○ Hapū and iwi are acknowledged as distinct communities with their own needs and aspirations.

	○ We actively listen to the views of tangata whenua and engage early in our decision-making, supported by a strong understanding of tikanga and te reo. • Vibrant places and connected communities ○ We provide vibrant, safe places that support social connections. ○ We celebrate the rich history of iwi throughout our public spaces and facilities. ○ We provide choices for safe and effective transport connections. ○ We connect people with nature through our reserves and public places. ○ We provide venues, infrastructure and support for events that bring us together. ○ We support arts and culture adding to the quality of life. • Resilient communities working in partnership ○ We provide resilient infrastructure that meets our community's intergenerational needs. ○ We partner and collaborate with others to find shared solutions. ○ Our community is empowered to lead initiatives, build connections and increase participation. ○ We facilitate access to affordable, good quality and resilient homes. • Innovative, thriving economy ○ We welcome visitors and create inviting public places. ○ Our town centres are places of activity and excitement. ○ Our infrastructure helps us connect with the rest of the world. ○ We build on our strengths and are open to new ideas. ○ We think boldly and drive economic growth through innovation. • Flourishing environment ○ We think and act with an intergenerational view and embrace our role as kaitiaki. ○ Our drive for reuse and regeneration helps build a circular economy. ○ Our climate response remains agile as we work to reduce our carbon emissions. ○ We manage wastewater and stormwater discharges to protect our water quality. ○ We encourage and protect our natural ecosystems.

Appendix 8: PESTLE opportunities and challenges across the Waikato region

	Opportunities	Challenges
Political	• Local climate change response plans. • National policy reform for resource management, water, health and education. • Central government priority to rebuild the economy. • Coalition government priorities to deliver better health, education, housing and infrastructure. • Regional development opportunities through partnership with central government. *Further opportunities unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Growing global political trend towards climate action. • New forms of engagement citizen-centric, digital technologies.	• A need for local government to partner with central government to deliver infrastructure wanted and needed by communities. • Meeting multiple community and iwi expectations, and acting as an agent to the Crown. • Incentives created by three-year political cycles favour responding to immediate needs rather than longer-term planning. • Increased responsibilities and constrained revenue base for local government. • Community participation in council consultations is low and often impacted by media disinformation. *Further challenges unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Global political uncertainty, volatility and instability.
Economic	• Using infrastructure to support economic diversification and sustainability, as well as population growth and structural changes. • Broadening the objectives of infrastructure investment to include supporting the wellbeing of people in the region, in addition to supporting economic diversification and sustainability. • Fast-track approvals process to consent regionally significant infrastructure. • Utilising asset renewals to replace ageing infrastructure with new assets that are more resilient to climate change and are more flexible to support the community to adopt future new economic activities as they arise. • Optimising the potential of the region's awa to support economic activity. • Further developing geothermal energy sources where	• Contrary challenges of population growth, decline and structural change in across the region. • Maintaining infrastructure in towns with declining population and economy. • Constrained local government funding sources for infrastructure. • Unaffordability of maintaining or replacing ageing infrastructure assets. • Decreasing viability of current stormwater and water treatment assets. • Climate change will affect the level of service that existing infrastructure can provide, and future infrastructure will need to be flexible to cope with risks. • Risk to people, property, and infrastructure from climate change • Climate change and extreme weather events such as drought and flooding are impacting the productivity of farms. • Changing land use and the loss of versatile land to residential housing is also creating limitations for the agricultural sector. *Further challenges unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • High inflation in recent years contributing to cost of living crisis – high costs for basic commodities including food and energy.

	Opportunities	Challenges
	ecological impacts can be minimised. • Exploring how Māori world views and mātauranga Māori can support intergenerational and long-term thinking in infrastructure development. • Whai Rawa: The Māori economy is a growing force. *Further opportunities unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Waters reforms to improve the quality of drinking water and the management of sewage services. • Sustainable agricultural production. • Reducing the carbon footprint of the agricultural sector. • Increasing support for local businesses.	• Aging population require increasing proportion of public and private resources. • A lack of local expertise in infrastructure planning and maintenance, resulting in a need to rely on international contractors with higher costs and uncertain availability. • Future upgrades and new infrastructure will be required to meet higher environmental and sustainability standards, which will increase costs. • Cost of maintaining roading and transport links across the region. • Possibility that a global-scale climate-related natural disaster will lead to massive debt defaults. • Policy responses to climate change may also have an impact, with the cost of carbon emissions likely to make construction costs more expensive.
Social	• Ensuring access to social, health and community services for all to reduce isolation and disconnection and support community participation. • Investment in social amenities. • Enabling older people and those living with a disability to flourish through improved access to education, employment and training opportunities, including voluntary work. • Enabling young people to flourish through improved access to education, jobs and training opportunities. • Partnering in iwi and Māori community development, using models that reflect Māori world views. • Iwi leadership in regional issues and governance. • Climate leases that enable managed retreat. *Further opportunities unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Fostering engagement of all population groups in local governance. • Growth of Māori and Pasifika population, particularly the younger demographic. • Acknowledging and redressing injustices and inequities of the	• Urban growth and rural depopulation. • Increasing housing costs (in absolute terms and relative to incomes) • Isolation of aging population – reduced engagement in society and access to community services. • Marae, cultural heritage and food gathering sites in coastal low-lying areas that are at risk of being lost by sea erosion and inundation. *Further challenges unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Higher than average rates of social deprivation across the region. • Increased societal division and disconnection, political extremism and increased racial tension, inflamed by social media and misinformation.

	Opportunities	Challenges
	past, particularly in relation to Te Tiriti. • Investment in training and development. • Increasingly fluid and flexible nature of employment. • Partnerships with the creative sector in the Waikato to support inclusive and engaging connections between people and places.	
Technological	• Emerging infrastructure in communication, culture and knowledge. • Innovation trends in transport – electrification, shared mobility and automation. • Reduced emissions from electric vehicles. • Distributed energy infrastructure and clean energy. *Further opportunities unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Hyperconnectivity – more connected communities. • Advancements in biotechnology. • New innovations in food production. • Machine learning, AI, big data.	• Digital inequity and lack of internet and telecommunication access in some rural areas. • Adaptability of existing infrastructure to new technology. • Public demand for information, especially environmental. • Adaptability of transport planning to changing preferences. • Limits of current large-scale energy generation and maintenance. *Further challenges unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Competitors to traditional farming and food systems approaches. • Ensuring an adaptable and creative workforce able to meet challenges of new technologies. • Cybersecurity is constantly needing to adapt and respond to new threats.
Legal	• Integrated spatial planning may come in through new RM legislation. • Partnership with Māori and Treaty settlements.	• National policy reform for resource management, water, health and education creating new mandates for councils. • Uncertain future direction from central government.
Environmental	• Focused spatial planning for land and water resource use. • Transitioning to green infrastructure that is more resilient to climate change and can also provide amenity benefits to the community. • Enabling mode shift to active transport (such as walking and cycling) or public transport (bus or rail). • Protecting and re-establishing wetlands, establishing new wetlands and restoring drained peat soils to prevent carbon loss and improve freshwater. • Further expansion of renewable energy sources,	• Declining natural capital, including indigenous biodiversity and essential ecosystem services • Sea level rise from climate change and land subsidence threatens coastal communities on the west coast and the western and northern Coromandel and Hauraki Plains. • Declining water quality due to nutrient concentrations. • Water storage – demand for water increasing while rainfall is decreasing - implications for freshwater ecosystems, urban water supply, primary sector productivity and constraints on future growth.

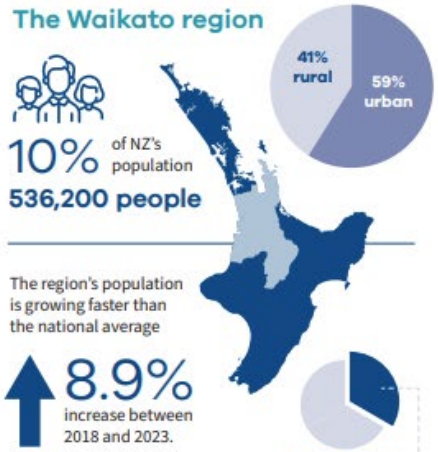
	Opportunities	Challenges
	such as solar and wind energy, will further reduce pollution and carbon emissions from fossil fuel use. • Rezoning based on modelled climate change hazards and inundation to prevent inappropriate development in the wrong place. • Urban intensification to reduce greenfield expansion. • Use of green spaces and green corridors in new urban developments. • Creating significant natural areas (SNAs) in urban spaces and promoting their growth. • Protecting and enhancing insights offered through Mātauranga Māori. *Further opportunities unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Incentives towards protecting and enhancing wetlands and restoring drained peat soils. • Creating a circular economy. • Supporting local biodiversity projects. • Accelerating predator-free policies and actions. • Green incentives to build biodiversity resilience and indigenous planting in farming systems. • Expanding education in schools and the community on the importance of biodiversity and green spaces.	• Water allocations are approaching or exceeding limits in several major catchments. • Greenfield expansion creeping along both ends of the Waikato Expressway and the loss of fertile, flexible land. • Long-term shift required to improve environmental outcomes. *Further challenges unlikely to be addressed by an RSS:* • Lack of knowledge of the efficacy of nature-based solutions. • Soil compaction a common issue under intensive land use due to farm machinery and stock undermining structure • Contaminants from phosphate fertiliser are also building up in soils in parts of the region. • Increase in extreme weather events – more likely, more intense, longer lasting and/or larger in scale. • Ongoing plant and pest invasions.

Appendix 9: Theme infographics

Development and growth

The development and growth theme focuses on how the region's population is expected to grow, where growth is currently planned to be accommodated and factors and constraints that need to be considered in planning for future development.

The Waikato region



10% of NZ's population

536,200 people

The region's population is growing faster than the national average

8.9% increase between 2018 and 2023.

Hamilton is home to more than one-third of the region's population.

Waikato is the 4th largest regional economy in NZ.

Waikato is known as an agricultural (particularly dairy farming) region.

Agriculture contributed

8.4% of regional GDP in 2021: a larger proportion than any other industry.

Waikato provides about 13% of NZ's exports of goods and services.

Dairy, meat and forestry contribute the largest proportion of the region's exports.

Key issues

- There are a range of physical constraints that mean development should avoid certain areas or should proceed with caution.
- Urban growth needs to be balanced with rural land uses.
- Infrastructure capacity and funding is a key challenge in planning for growth.
- The need to consider how a changing climate will impact land uses across the region in the future.
- Pressures on water allocation.

Examples of constraints/areas to avoid

The wāhi toitū layer includes Department of Conservation and Ngā Whenua Rāhui land, steep slopes, high erosion risk, QEII covenants, reserves, SNAs, outstanding natural landscapes, indigenous vegetation, wetlands, high flood risk, wāhi tapu, archaeological areas, iwi sites of significance and marae.

The wāhi toiora layer includes rivers, lakes, river work buffers, drinking water supply, organic soils and erosion.

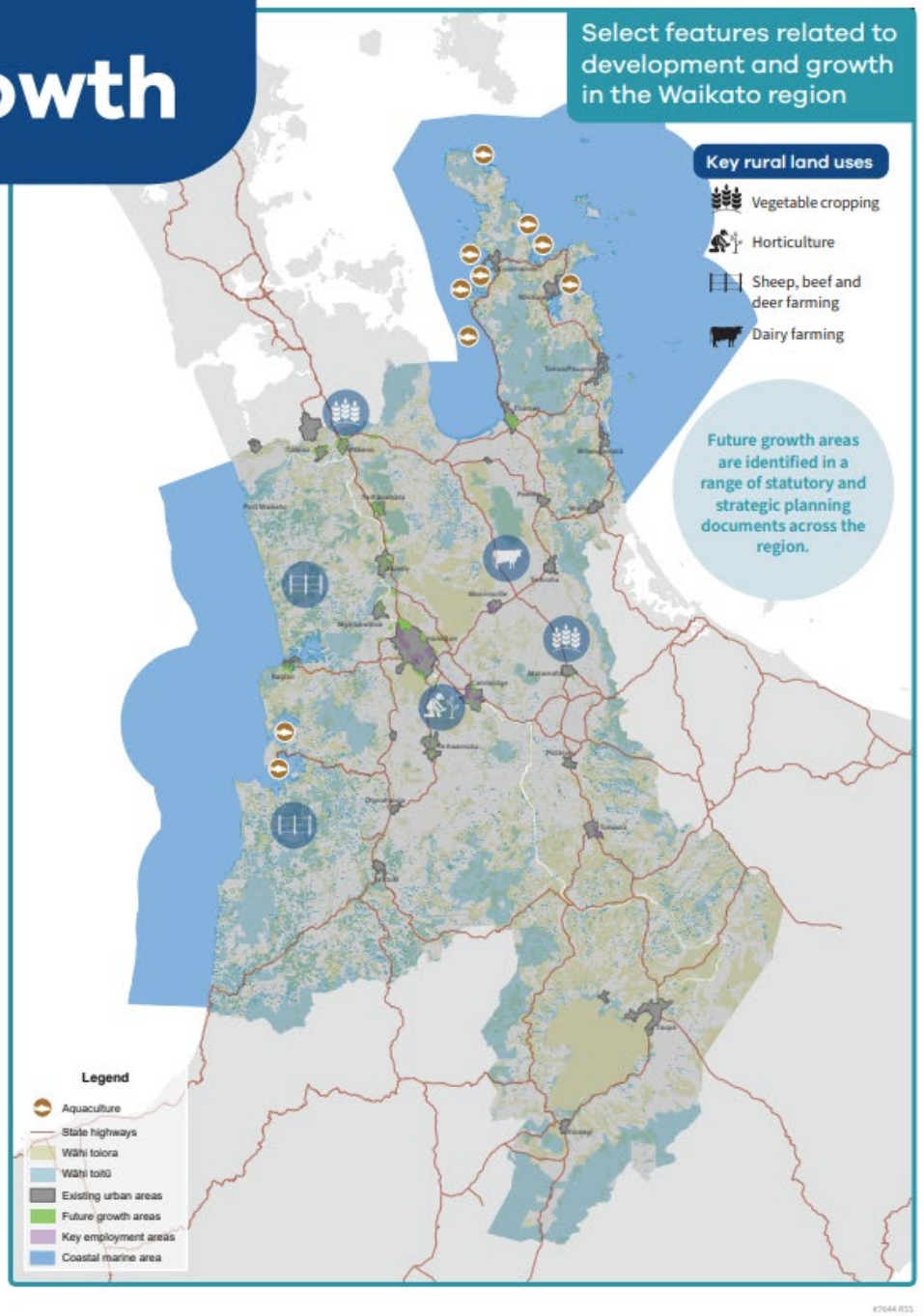
The area of highly productive land (LUC Classes 1, 2 and 3) restricted by urban use in the region increased by 20% between 2002 and 2019

Opportunities

Growing along transport corridors

Increasing density in existing urban areas

Protecting rural land uses



Infrastructure

Infrastructure includes the major fixed physical assets, structures and networks that support communities and contribute to quality of life. The inventory largely focuses on public and essential infrastructure, including transport, water, energy and communications infrastructure and social infrastructure, such as healthcare and education facilities. However, there are also significant private infrastructure assets in the region that may be useful to consider in an RSS.

Key features

16% of NZ SH's on 10% of the land area

North Island and East Coast Main Trunk Lines

Key corridor region for electricity transmission

Over 1/3 of NZ's electricity generation

Councils manage, maintain and operate

71 water supply schemes

53 wastewater schemes

74 stormwater catchments

WRC flood management network includes

468 floodgates | **116** pump stations | **601km** of stopbanks

These protect over 300,000ha of land and help to realise and protect community infrastructure that generates over $2.2 billion of economic activity annually.

The region's infrastructure corridors (road and rail) play an important role in facilitating the inter-regional movement of people and freight through the Golden Diamond of Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions.

Key issues

Insufficient funding is the key issue for infrastructure in the Waikato region. Infrastructure upgrades, renewal and new projects are largely funded by ratepayers, often through targeted levies on the part of the community most impacted or benefitted most. This, combined with the decreasing viability and increasing unaffordability of maintaining or replacing ageing infrastructure assets means councils are not able to keep up with the demands of infrastructure provision.

Other challenges include:

- Pressure on existing, and demand for new, infrastructure in growing urban areas.
- Risk to infrastructure assets from climate change and natural hazards, affecting the level of service that existing infrastructure can provide.
- Adaptability of existing infrastructure and planning for new technology and changing preferences.
- Dependencies on finite resources and minerals.

Opportunities

Enhancing transport corridors

Increasing renewable electricity

Water security plan

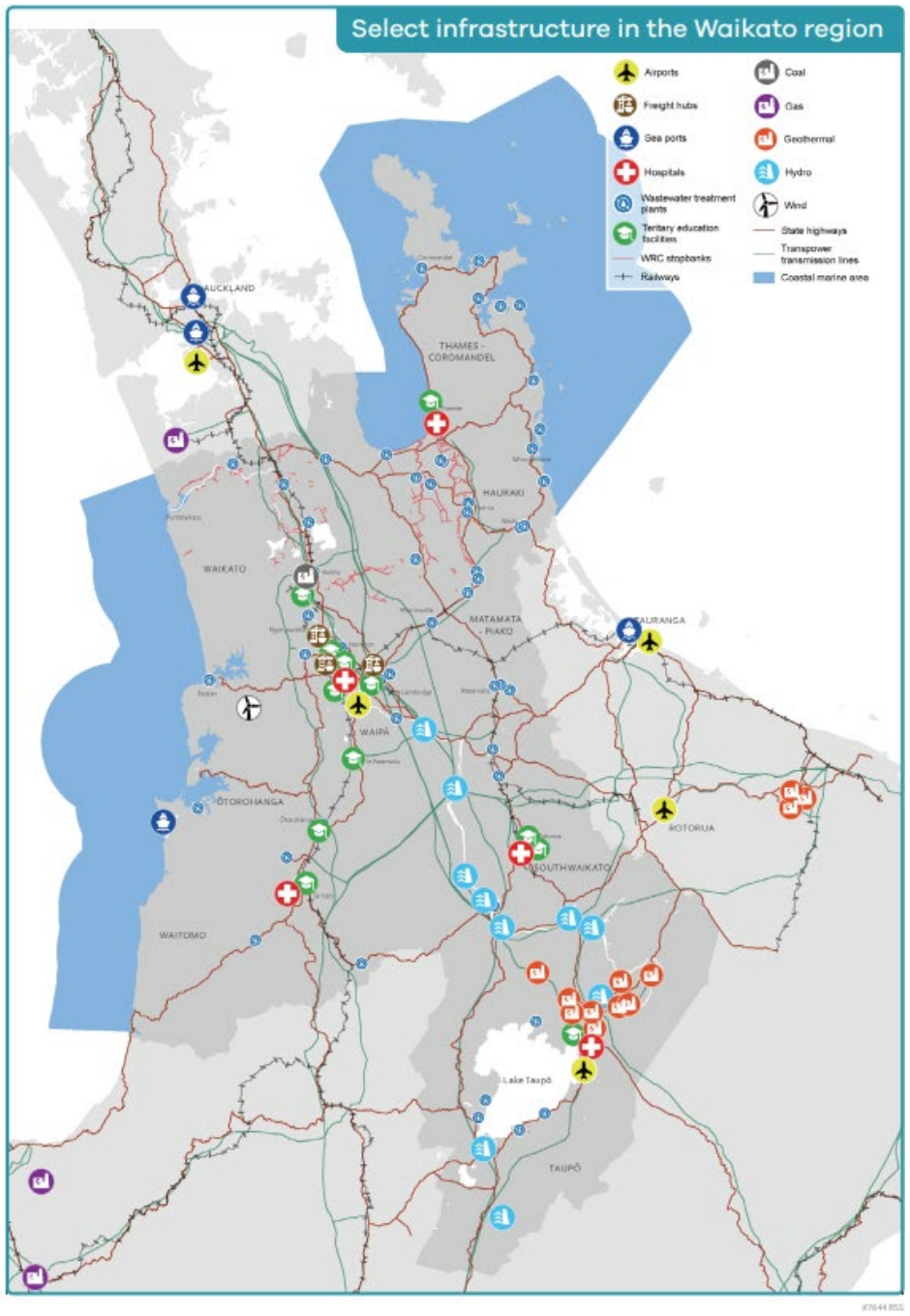
Transitioning to green and resilient infrastructure

Significant infrastructure projects are planned and proposed across the region:

1078 projects identified in the Waikato region in the National Infrastructure Pipeline

2 Roads of National Significance:
- Hamilton Southern Links
- SH1 Cambridge to Piarere

4 infrastructure and 4 renewable electricity projects listed in the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024



Natural environment

Growth and development put pressure on the region's natural environment. The natural environment theme is focused on the features and areas in the natural environment that are already or should be protected, restored or enhanced as the region continues to grow and develop in the future.

Key environmental features

Waikato River, the longest in New Zealand

Lake Taupō, the largest lake in New Zealand

Three RAMSAR wetlands – Whangamarino, Kopuatai Peat Dome and Firth of Thames

Tongariro National Park, which is a World Heritage Area

Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, New Zealand's largest mainland ecological island

New Zealand's largest karst area

10,000km² of coastal marine area, including parts of the Hauraki Gulf

70% of New Zealand's geothermal resources

74% of New Zealand's geothermal vegetation

The Waikato region is home to:

More than 900 species of native plants

124 native bird species

Two native frog species

Two species of native bat

19 reptiles (including geckos, skinks and tuatara)

The region's streams, rivers and lakes provide habitat for many species of fish and invertebrates.

Key issues

Around three-quarters of the Waikato region's native land cover has been converted to farms and exotic forests and drained of wetlands over the past 150 years. Only about 28% of the region remains as native forests and wetlands.

At least 300 native plant and animal species in the Waikato region are threatened with extinction. This includes all native bat and frog species, 40% of bird species and around 1 in 5 native plant species in the region.

Other key issues include:

- Impacts of land use on water quality
- Warming climate creating favourable conditions for invasive species that affect indigenous biodiversity
- Loss of habitat and habitat connectivity due to ongoing development pressures
- Long-term shift required to improve environmental outcomes
- Lack of knowledge of the efficacy of nature-based solutions
- Ongoing plant and pest invasions.

Opportunities

Creating connected corridors

Connecting existing restoration efforts

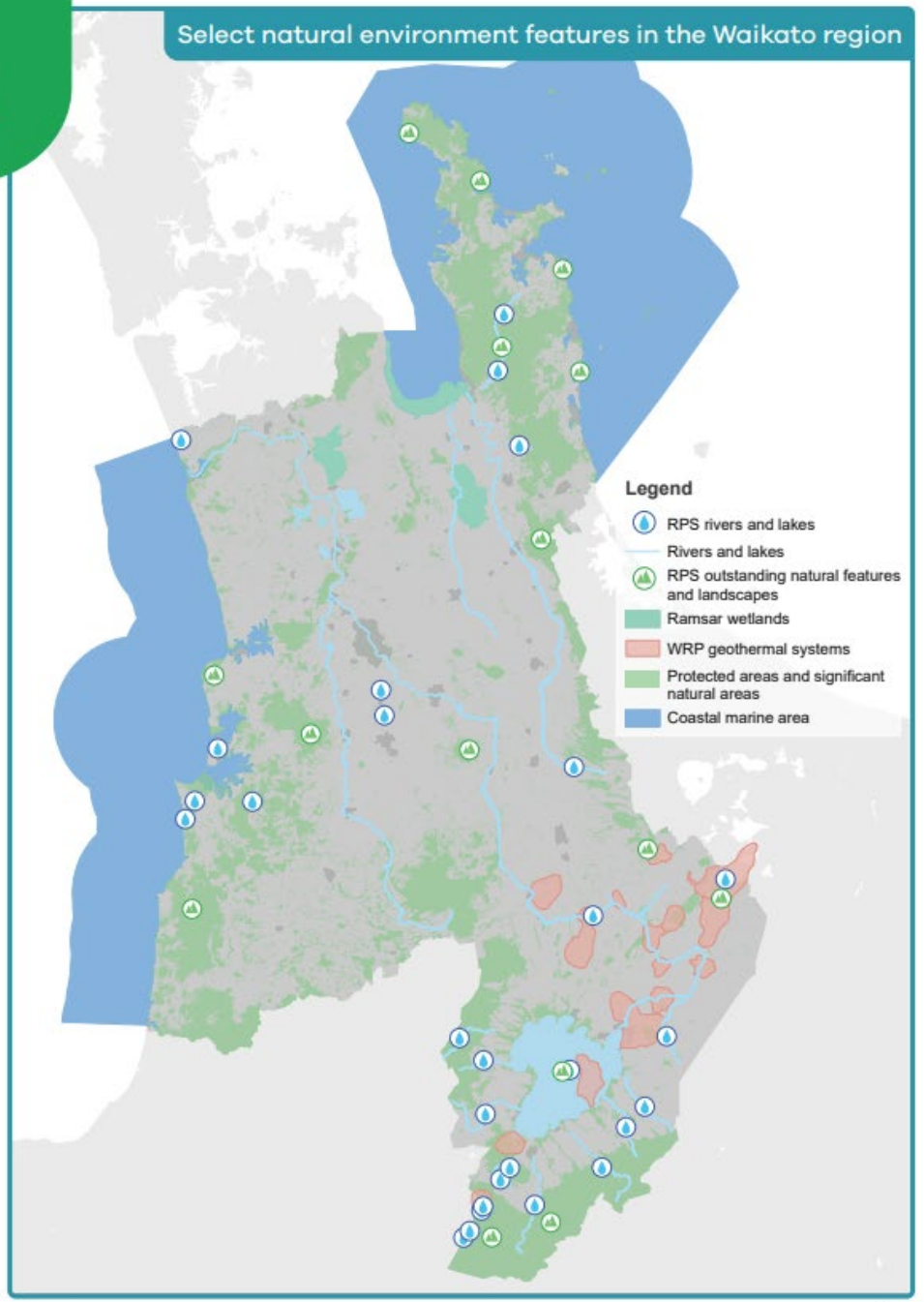
Nature-based solutions

Improve integrated pest management

Around 17% of the region's land is in some form of legal protection:

92% public land (Department of Conservation and local authority reserves)

8% private land (QEII covenants and Ngā Whenua Rāhui kawenata)



Resilience

Climate in the Waikato region is changing, and so are the risks the region may face as a result, with the frequency, severity and impact of natural hazards increasing. The resilience theme collates information relating to natural hazards and climate change across the region, which will be a key consideration for an RSS.

Impacts of a changing climate

The region is projected to face higher temperatures, particularly in summer. Droughts will become more frequent and intense, increasing the risk of water shortages and wildfires, and need for adaptation in farming approaches.

Longer dry periods can exacerbate land instability as dry, cracked ground is more prone to failure during intense rainfall.

Fewer frost days are expected, which can affect winter recreational activities and tourism.

Rainfall variability will result in more intense extreme rainfall events and increased flooding. Intense rainfall and river flooding also drive increased land instability, including landslides and erosion.

Windy days are expected to decrease, but storm intensity and extreme precipitation will increase, leading to more severe weather events.

Sea level rise will exacerbate coastal inundation and erosion, with extreme sea levels occurring more frequently.

Opportunities

Transition to a low emissions economy

Renewable electricity generation

Proactive land use planning for natural hazards and climate change

Climate change response plans

Natural hazards

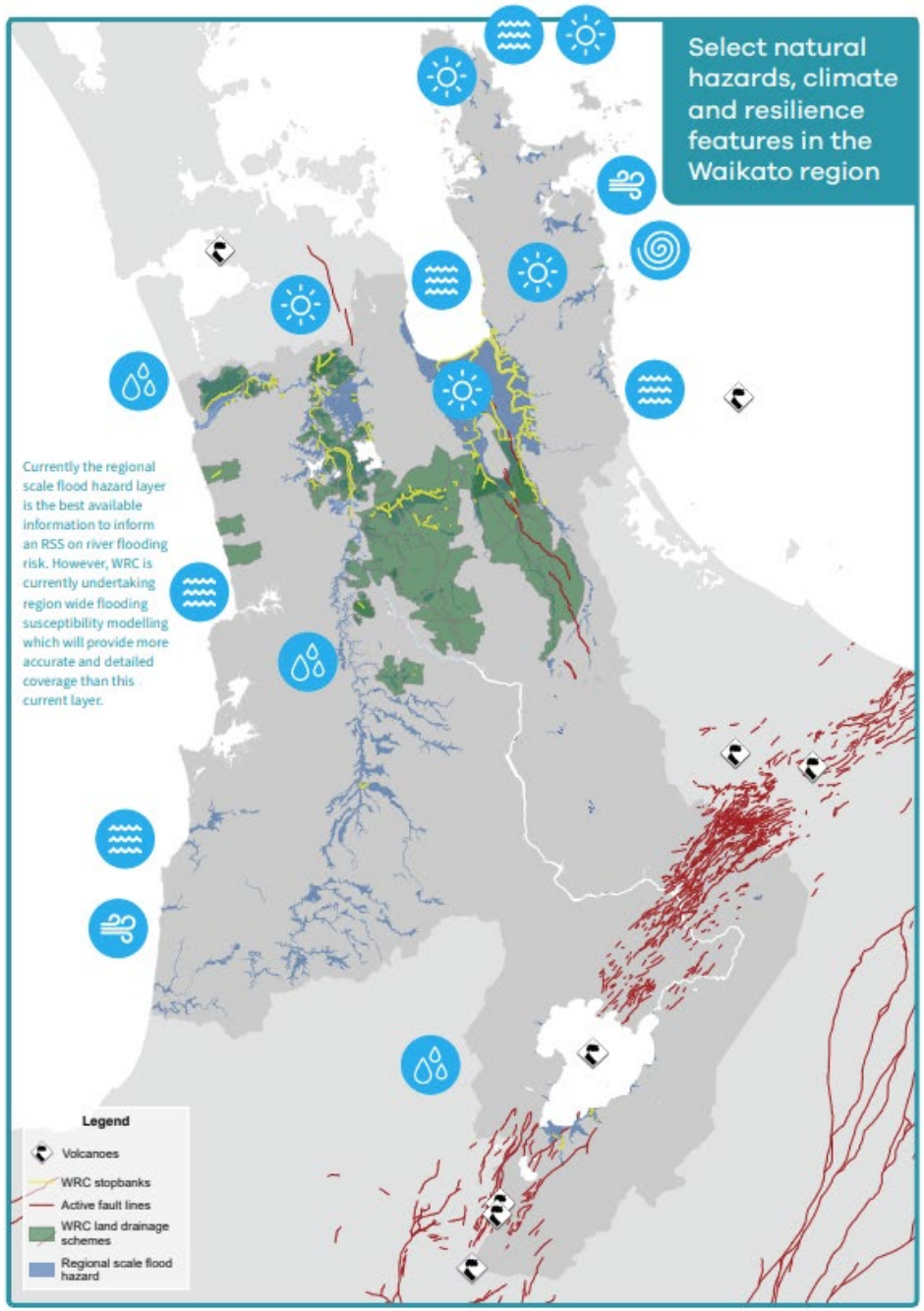
Different parts of the region are more susceptible to different natural hazards, such as drought, river flooding, coastal inundation, erosion, landslides, wildfire and earthquakes.

Other key sources of information for an RSS:

- Ministry for the Environment climate projection data.
- WRC is undertaking modelling for a range of natural hazards that will provide more accurate and detailed coverage than the current spatial information available.
- Local adaptation planning documents provide critical information on how climate change risks are identified and managed at a community level.

Summary of projected climate changes for the Waikato region

- Warmer. Increased drought.
- Increased rainfall intensity.
- Increasing sea levels. Increased storm surge.
- Increased westerly winds (winter and spring). Increased north easterly winds (late summer and autumn).
- Increased tropical cyclones.



Community connections

The community connections theme collates information to better understand the places that connect people across the region and how people move between these places.

Demographic snapshot

- Population density varies across the region. Hamilton has a high population density at around 1,600 people per square kilometre whereas southern parts of the region are much more sparsely populated.
- The Waikato region has an aging population. However, age distribution varies greatly across the region. Hamilton City has a particularly young population, whereas Thames-Coromandel has the highest median age of any district in New Zealand.
- The Māori proportion of the population is high relative to the national average across most of the region and is particularly high in the south of the region.
- The Māori population has a much younger age profile than the general population. The number of young Pasifika people in the region is also growing.
- There are a wide range of ethnic groups in the Waikato region. The seven largest ethnic groups are New Zealand European, Māori, other European, Indian, Southeast Asian, Chinese and Samoan.

5 public hospitals

286 education organisations (excluding early childhood)

University of Waikato rated in the top **1.1%** of universities in the world

500+ community facilities

- halls and community centres
- sport and recreation
- libraries
- arts and culture

Key issues

About 200,000 people live in towns and rural areas outside the Hamilton, Waipā and Waikato sub-region. However, major health facilities, tertiary education and essential social services are concentrated in larger centres such as Hamilton, Thames and Taupō. This means transport needs are high across the region, particularly for those who live rurally, are young or elderly or have a disability. Isolation and inability to participate in society is a key issue that an RSS can seek to address, particularly by considering regional public transport needs and other social infrastructure.

Other key issues include:

- higher than average rates of social deprivation and the intergenerational social issues that poverty and other associated issues create
- social division, disconnection from community and a growing mistrust in information.

Tourism

Key tourism connections include SH1 running north-south through the region, and connections across to the Coromandel Peninsula, Tauranga and Rotorua.

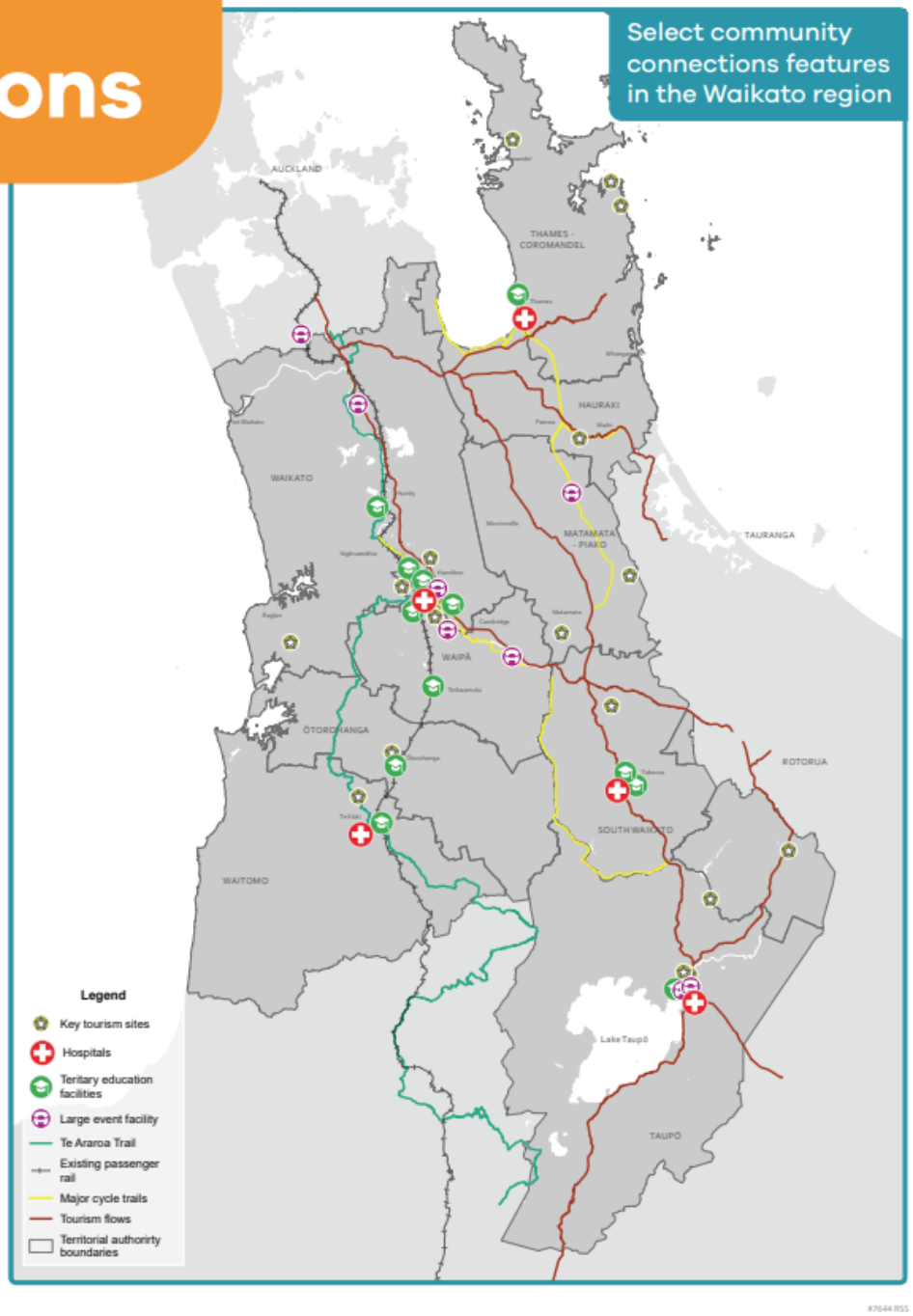
Major tourist attractions include the Waitomo Caves, Hobbiton, Te Waihou Walkway/Blue Spring, Lake Taupō and Huka Falls, Cathedral Cove, Raglan, Lake Karāpiro, Hamilton Gardens and the region's cycle trails.

Opportunities

Public and active transport

Enhancing tourism infrastructure

Iwi/Māori community development



Indigenous culture and heritage

Information on indigenous culture and heritage shows that councils have iwi obligations relating to the entire region and that Māori culture is important across the whole region. It highlights a need to consider culture and heritage as an underlying basis for an RSS.

There are over 40 iwi and more than 180 hapū with interests in the Waikato region.

The principal iwi groups are Waikato, Maniapoto, Raukawa, Hauraki, Te Arawa and Tūwharetoa.

134 marae are mapped across the region.

Iwi management plans

An iwi management plan is a document developed and approved by iwi to address matters of resource management activity of significance in their respective rohe (region). Iwi management plans provide insight into the outcomes sought by iwi from resource management planning and actions currently being undertaken by iwi that may influence spatial planning for the region.

There are currently 26 iwi management plans in the Waikato region.

Iwi throughout the region have expressed a desire to work in various forms of partnership with local authorities. Some of these aspirations are embedded via Treaty of Waitangi settlements, whilst others are expressed by memorandum of understanding and other formal and informal relationships.

Joint management agreements

Waikato Regional Council has joint management agreements (JMAs) with Raukawa, Te Arawa river iwi, Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto and Tūwharetoa.

JMA boundaries in the Waikato region relate to the Waikato and Waipā river catchments whereas the environmental management plans often span the full rohe of iwi.

Opportunities

Opportunities exist through RSS development to enhance partnerships with iwi and protect cultural heritage sites which are vulnerable due to development or climate change, including:

- exploring how Māori world views and mātauranga Māori can support intergenerational and long-term thinking in development, infrastructure planning and natural environment protection
- supporting the Māori economy, which is a growing force
- enabling iwi leadership in regional issues and governance
- supporting the growing Māori population, particularly the younger demographic.

The areas of interest to iwi are overlapping in some areas and also extend beyond regional and district boundaries into other neighbouring regions.