



Te Pae Tawhiti Strategic Direction

2026-2036

He taiao mauriora

Healthy environment

He hapori hihiri

Vibrant communities

He ōhanga pakari

Strong economy

Tuia te rangi e tū nei, tuia te papa e takoto nei, tuia ki te pou herenga tangata, te pou herenga waka.

E tangi ana te ngākau i te hunga kua rere ki te kōpunitanga o te wāhi ngaro i ngā tau kua taha, tae ake ki ngā raukura kōtuku whai mana o te rohe.

I te tau 2022, koia ko te Tumuaki, a Anaru Tāmihana i tangihia nuitia e tōna iwi. I te tau 2024, ka waipuketia te marae o Tūrangawaewae e ngā roimata o te motu mō Kiingi Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherowhero VII. I tērā tau, ka tanuku te tīhi o Tongariro i te rironga o Tā Tumu Te Heuheu Tūkino VIII. Nō reira, haere koutou. Haere ki te pūtahi nui o Rehua, ki te huihuinga o te kahurangi, ki te iwi kua whetūrangitia, okioki atu ai. Na, e kī ana te kōrero - mate atu he tētēkura, ara mai rā he tētēkura. Nō reira, kei te Tumuaki hōu, kei te poutokomanawa hōu o te Whare o Te Heuheu, tatū ki te Arikinui Kuini Nga wai hono i te po, koutou kua eke ki ngā tūranga i mahue mai i ō koutou mātua, i ō koutou tūpuna, tēnei ka mihi atu, tēnei ka mihi atu.

E ngā maunga whakahī, e ngā awa tuku kiri, e ngā hapori, puta noa i te rohe o Waikato, tēnā koutou katoa.

Kei te whakatakotoria i tēnei ahunga pae tawhiti ngā aronga mō te huarahi te haere mai nei — hei whakakotahi i a tātou:

- kia hikina te whai hua me te whai rawa
- kia tiakina ngā rawa taiao
- kia takatū tātou ki ngā huringa o te wā.

Nō reira, e te rohe, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

Let us come together.

We mourn those who have passed away in recent years, including respected leaders who held significant roles in this region.

In 2022, we mourned the passing of the Arikinui o Ngāti Hauā, Te Tumuaki, Anaru Tāmihana. In 2024, the nation grieved the death of King Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherowhero VII. In 2025, Tā Tumu Te Heuheu Tūkino VIII, a highly respected leader and guardian of Tongariro and its people, passed. We acknowledge their service and contribution, and we recognise those who have stepped into leadership roles following them, including the Queen, Nga wai hono i te po, and others who now carry these responsibilities.

We also acknowledge all who are indivisible from the Waikato region itself — its mountains, rivers and communities.

This 10-year direction sets a clear course for the future. It is intended to bring us together around shared priorities, so that by working in a coordinated way we can:

- lift productivity and prosperity
- safeguard natural resources
- adapt to economic and legislative changes.

We acknowledge all who make this region what it is.

The meaning behind our tohu

The pou, or pillars, can be likened to the pillars of a traditional meeting house, symbolising support, strength and resilience.

The niho taniwha, or teeth-like triangular pattern, represent leadership, stability and unity.

Together, and with three pou standing strong, they become a tohu – a symbol of our purpose of working together for a Waikato region that has a healthy environment, vibrant communities and strong economy.

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E takatū ai te kaunihera, te rohe

Shaping our council, our region

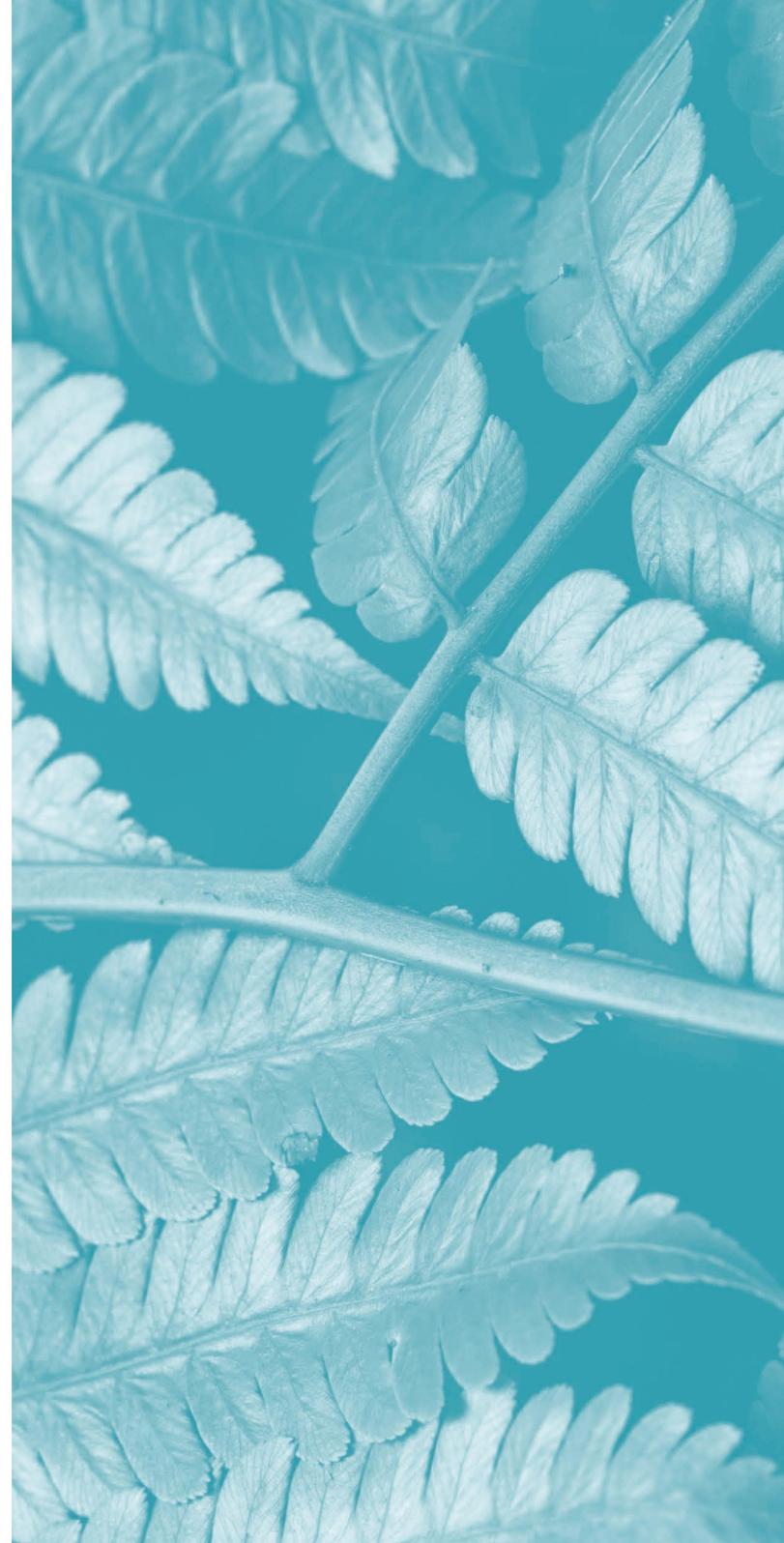
The decade ahead will be one of profound transformation. Geopolitical uncertainty, shifts in global systems, new technologies, climate impacts, resource pressures, the cost of living burden and social fragmentation are creating a complex set of challenges. To respond, we need to address today's economic pressures while also planning for a more resilient, prosperous and equitable future for the Waikato region.

We need a strong economy underpinned by a healthy environment.

This strategy sets a clear direction for the next decade with a focus on delivery for the period 2026-2029.

As regional council governance enters a period of major reform, our role is twofold: provide stability and continuity for our people and communities today and prepare our organisation to successfully transition – essentially 'lift and shift' – into whatever future emerges. This requires a commitment to being a future-fit and high-performing organisation – one that makes evidence-based, technology-enabled decisions that are informed by the experiences, aspirations and preferences of the people and communities we serve.

Our overarching ambition is to help lift the region's productivity and prosperity by managing our natural resources sustainably. Achieving this requires us to be clear about the council's role in shaping the conditions for long term, sustainable regional growth. Decisions must be based on strong evidence and insights that enable leaders – across the sector, our communities, iwi partners and central government – to transparently balance environmental, social and economic considerations.



This matters because the Waikato region plays a pivotal role in New Zealand's economy and resilience. Yet the pressures on the region are intensifying. Extreme weather events increasingly threaten communities, critical infrastructure and primary production. Most productive land is already in use, and pressures on streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands continue to grow. Invasive species further threaten environmental and human health.

These challenges are interconnected, complex and transcend local boundaries, requiring coordinated, practical and affordable catchment-scale solutions. This is where we hold deep and distinctive expertise. Over 36 years, we have operated at scale, carrying out environmental regulation, natural hazard identification, flood management, biosecurity management, transport planning, navigation safety and emergency management, as well as gathering, analysing and interpreting the data and science that underpin all these activities. Alongside this mahi, we have developed long-standing partnerships with iwi.

These capabilities are at the heart of what makes the Waikato region productive, resilient and prosperous, and will continue to be essential regardless of future governance arrangements.

Government reforms will reshape how regions deliver services and how they are governed. Being part of the conversation is critical. With our experience delivering services at scale, we are well positioned to help get the future model right for Waikato communities.



Matawhānui **Vision**

Waikato: Empowered people shaping a healthy, prosperous place for generations to come.

Aronga **Purpose**

Working together for a Waikato region that has a healthy environment, vibrant communities and strong economy.

Ngā uara **Values**

Kia tika ▲ **Responsible**

Our people model the highest standards of personal and professional behaviour in all job-related activities.

Kia tau ▲ **Respectful**

Showing others respect is the basis of all our behaviour.

Kia toa ▲ **Effective**

We always aim to give the best we can.



[Read more about our values on our website](#)

A diverse economy spanning agriculture, advanced manufacturing, technology, renewable energy, aquaculture, tourism, healthcare and forestry.

The region's strengths are further supported by a growing Māori economy and the longstanding cultural regional leadership of the Kīngitanga.

Māori asset base

\$21.51b
in the Waikato

↑ 88%
from 2018
to 2023

Waikato's contribution to farming, food and forestry GDP

14% of NZ's forest products industries



- Forestry and logging
- Wood product manufacturing
- Pulp and paper

18%



- of NZ's food manufacturing
- Meat and meat product manufacturing
 - Seafood processing
 - Dairy product manufacturing

22%



- of NZ's farming
- Sheep, beef and grain
 - Dairy farming
 - Poultry, deer and other livestock

19%

of NZ's food industry



- Farmers, growers and aquaculture plus food manufacturing

32%

of NZ's dairy manufacturing



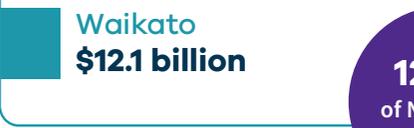
NZ's most important dairying region

Exports

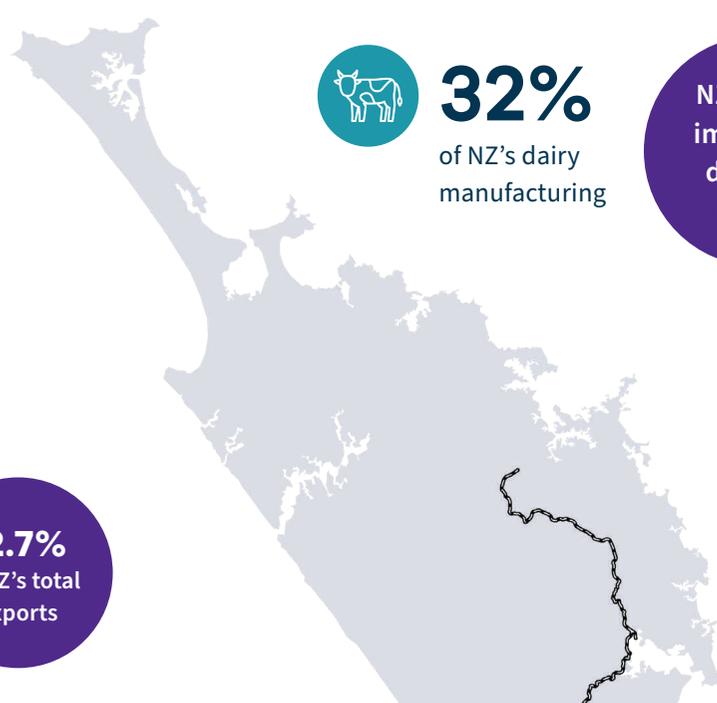
NZ \$95 billion



Waikato \$12.1 billion



12.7%
of NZ's total exports



Waikato trends and opportunities

To inform the development of this strategic direction, the council commissioned an analysis of political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental trends and their implications for the governance of the Waikato region. Drawing on feedback from community leaders and subject matter experts, we identified the following key opportunities for this strategic direction:

- Accelerate environmental sustainability and energy resilience through optimising land use, restoring natural systems, partnering with iwi, incentivising environmental improvements, and scaling catchment initiatives.
- Build a resilient Waikato community and economy able to adapt to global shocks, climate change and technological disruption, transition to a low-emissions circular economy, and foster innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Strengthen community engagement by listening to local aspirations, building civic trust, countering misinformation, clarifying decision-making roles, and promoting the Waikato identity internationally.
- Support a technology-enabled region by leveraging primary industry strengths, advancing bioeconomy, agritech and applied technology, improving data use, strengthening sector collaboration, showcasing technology exemplars and promoting digital inclusion.



View the full Waikato Region Trends and Opportunities report on our website

Leader in electricity production

Thermal
1,379MW

Geothermal
1,074MW

Wind
64MW

Hydro
1,531.5MW

37%
of NZ's
electricity
capacity

More than any other single region

532,100
people in
the Waikato

Flood infrastructure

Valued at
\$1.1 billion

Protecting land that contributes
\$2.5 billion to regional GDP

Critical national transport, freight and logistics corridor

40% of NZ's freight movements



Significant mineral producing area



Waikato contributes
~20%
of NZ's mining GDP

Popular visitor destinations

1. Coromandel Peninsula
2. Hamilton Gardens
3. Raglan
4. Karāpiro
5. Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari
6. Te Waihou Blue Spring
7. Waitomo Caves
8. Hobbiton
9. Lake Taupō

Critical producer of aggregates

Supplying a large proportion of material that supports economic growth in both the Waikato and Auckland regions

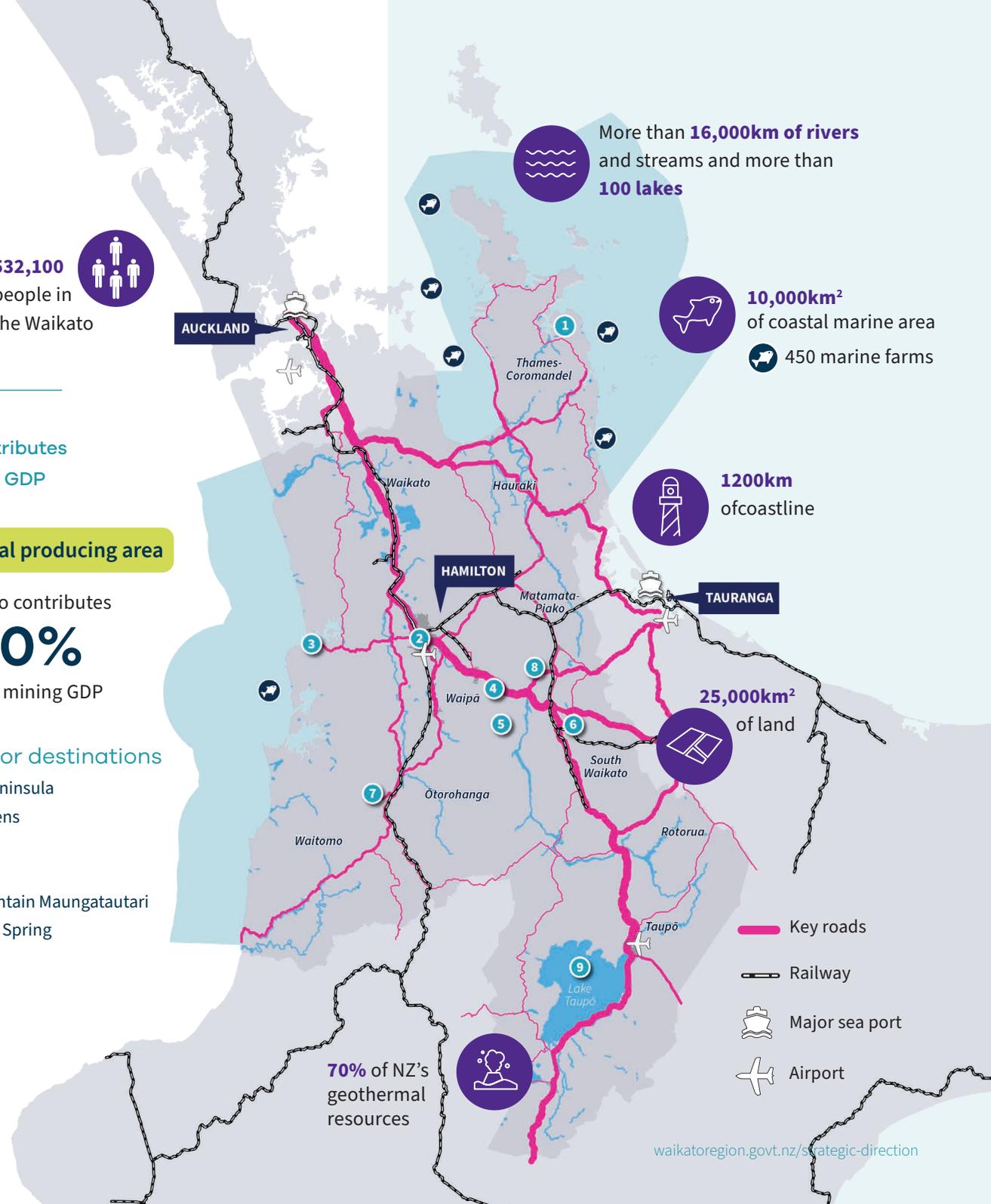
Waikato
15.2 tonnes
per person



NZ wide
7.1 tonnes
per person

Note

- Gross domestic product (GDP) and population data are for 2025, sourced from Infometrics and Stats NZ.
- Aggregate production is for 2023, sourced from the Aggregate & Quarry Association Fact Files.
- Māori asset base insights sourced from Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL).



More than **16,000km** of rivers and streams and more than **100 lakes**

10,000km² of coastal marine area
450 marine farms

1200km of coastline

25,000km² of land

70% of NZ's geothermal resources

Ngā aronga nui

Our priorities

At the core of this strategy is a commitment to being a future-fit and high-performing organisation – one that makes evidence-based, technology-enabled decisions that are informed by the experiences, aspirations and preferences of the people and communities we serve.

Te whakarite mō āpōpō Future-fit organisation

Building value and thriving through uncertainty to successfully transition into any future state.

Ka tōnui, ka taurikura te rohe Productivity and prosperity

Enable and promote a productive region that delivers shared prosperity, profitability and security.

Kia manawaroa ake te rohe Building regional resilience

Support communities to understand natural hazard risks, take action to reduce them, and respond to and recover from disasters and change.

E toitū ai ngā rawa taiao Sustaining natural resources

Accelerate action to protect and restore the natural resources that make the Waikato nationally significant – our soils, water bodies, native plants and animals, geothermal areas, forests and coastal habitats.

Pūnaha waka tītike Optimised transport system

Maintain an integrated, safe and efficient transport system to improve mobility and equity, reduce emissions and support regional productivity.

Tracking our progress

Each priority has progress measures for the 2026-2029 period, which are assigned to one of seven groups of activities. You can [track the detailed plans and actions](#) on our website and in our annual reports.



Customer, community and services



Flood protection and control works



Integrated catchment management



Regional hazards and emergency response



Regional transport connections



Resource use



Science, policy and information

Te whakarite mō āpōpō Future-fit organisation

Building value and thriving through uncertainty to successfully transition into any future state.

To be future fit, we need to be in the best shape possible to 'lift and shift' essential regional services into whatever future local governance structures best serve the needs of the Waikato's diverse communities. We also need to ensure we are active participants in designing the future of local government.

Outcome

Our organisation, and the region, is change ready.

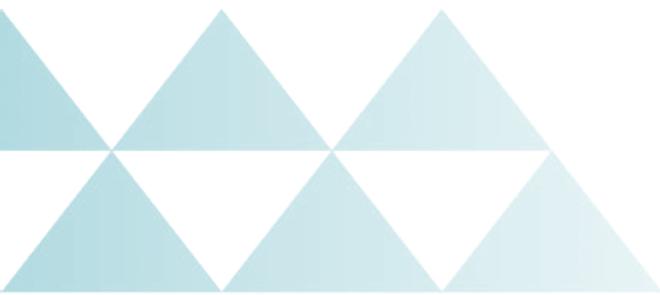
Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Actively share our expertise in coordinating and delivering regional and catchment-scale solutions and services to help work up options for reform, including alternative structures and governance mechanisms.	Regional councillors participate in forums and discussions, helping shape future legislative and governance frameworks.	
	Options for catchment-scale governance are developed and consulted on.	 
Continue to increase operational efficiency by championing opportunities for shared services, alternative revenue streams and digital services.	Benefits of the organisational performance strategy and measurement framework are realised as set out in the benefits realisation plan.	
Equip our people to build community trust, foster engagement, and embrace technology for greater productivity and innovation.	Achieve the actions set out in <i>He Manawa Tangata Our People Strategy 2025-2029</i> .	

Ka tōnui, ka taurikura te rohe

Productivity and prosperity

Enable and promote a productive region that delivers shared prosperity, profitability and security.

With its strong foundation of export-focused primary industries, strategic position connecting Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga, a growing Māori economy and strengths in education, technology and high-value manufacturing, this region is well-positioned for long-term success. A regional spatial plan and economic development strategy will be key to coordinating different policies and activities, helping spread economic growth more evenly and supporting the region's productivity and overall prosperity.



Outcome

The Waikato is recognised as a leading region for integrated spatial planning where well-coordinated decisions ensure the responsible use, development and protection of our natural and built resources.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Participate in the development of a spatial plan that aligns land use, infrastructure, environmental and cultural aspirations, and more.	Data and information shared with the Joint Regional Spatial Planning Committee.	

Outcome

An agreed direction for the regional economy to enable better decision making and efficient allocation of resources.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Adopt and promote a regional economic development strategy.	<p>The economic development strategy, accord and initiatives are agreed and implemented by the end of June 2026.</p> <p>Level of adoption of the economic development strategy by key stakeholders and sectors.</p> <p>Information and insights on the regional economy are provided regularly.</p>	 
Adopt and promote an energy strategy in collaboration with industry that champions a resilient, affordable and sustainable energy system for the Waikato.	<p>A region-wide energy forum is established and functioning by the end of December 2026 with active participation from iwi, councils, industry and energy stakeholders.</p> <p>Level of adoption of the energy strategy by key sectors and communities.</p> <p>Energy objectives, land use considerations and infrastructure pathways identified in the energy strategy are integrated into the region's developing spatial plan.</p>	

Kia manawaroa ake te rohe

Building regional resilience

Support communities to understand natural hazard risks, take action to reduce them, and respond to and recover from disasters and change.

Extreme weather and natural hazards such as floods pose growing risks to lives, livelihoods and critical infrastructure. Strengthening resilience is essential to reduce vulnerability and protect our communities and economy. While our flood infrastructure plays a critical role in protecting communities from risks, it must be accompanied by efforts to accommodate, avoid or minimise vulnerabilities.

Outcome

Communities are less vulnerable and exposed to natural hazards.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Ongoing engagement with iwi, communities, central government and territorial authorities to understand natural hazard risks, including how these are increasing with climate change, and to identify priority areas for adaptation planning and risk reduction.	The framework and plan for resilience to natural hazard risk meets adaptation legislation and helps inform the region's developing spatial plan. The impact of future climate risk is consistently incorporated into natural hazard risk management plans and decisions.	

Outcome

Flood impacts are reduced within agreed service levels for communities, and our flood infrastructure and drainage network is enduring and affordable for ratepayers.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Invest in, plan for and maintain a flood infrastructure and drainage network that is future proofed and financially sustainable throughout its lifecycle.	Implement recommendations relating to the Office of the Auditor-General's mitigating flood risk report, specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the current and future flood risk for a range of different flooding scenarios, including the projected impact of climate change. Understand and maintain the current performance of flood protection infrastructure, including to understand the costs involved in achieving different options for intended levels of service. Improve engagement with the public to ensure communities understand both flood risk and the extent of flood protection. 	
Develop a transparent, equitable and sustainable funding policy for flood management and drainage services.	By the end of June 2029, the review of funding for flood protection services will have been completed, consulted on and findings implemented.	
Ensure we are always response-ready and capable.	Waikato Regional Council has built and maintained an organisation-wide state of response readiness, with all staff trained, equipped and confident to activate and support emergency management functions for any event.	

E toitū ai ngā rawa taiao

Sustaining natural resources

Accelerate action to protect and restore the natural resources that make the Waikato nationally significant – our soils, water bodies, native plants and animals, geothermal areas, forests and coastal habitats.

The Waikato's natural resources underpin the health, identity and prosperity of our region, yet our native plants and animals and the ecosystems they live in are threatened. Protecting and restoring these natural assets is not only essential for a healthy environment; it's an investment in the Waikato's future.

Outcome

The Waikato's environment, economy and communities are protected from the impacts of pests, weeds and diseases.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Operate and maintain a collaborative, cohesive and comprehensive biosecurity system, leveraging risk assessment and technology for cost-effective delivery.	Achieve the measures as set out in the <i>Waikato Biosecurity Operational Plan 2022-2032: Implementing the Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032</i> .	

Outcome

Native plants and animals and the ecosystems they live in are thriving.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Gather necessary data to inform greater understanding of ecosystems from the mountains to the sea.	State of the environment reporting delivers accurate, compliant environmental information that supports evidence-based decision making and is accessible to partners and communities.	
Identify the highest priority biodiversity sites and support landowners to protect and restore them.	Implement the priority biodiversity sites programmes.	
Empower communities, iwi and partner agencies to actively participate in biodiversity protection and restoration.	Number of community groups and individuals funded through the Natural Heritage Partnership Programme that undertake restoration activities as per their funding agreement.	

Outcome

Water quality is maintained and improved, riverbanks are stable and flood risks reduced.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Deliver targeted, collaborative and innovative catchment and river management programmes.	Continue to deliver multi-partner river and catchment management programmes, meeting agreed outputs.	
Address the Environment Court's decision on Plan Change 1.	Timeframes set by the court are met.	  
Engage with local landowners, iwi, community groups and other agencies to achieve the Whangamarino Action Plan once it is approved.	Successful implementation of the Whangamarino Action Plan.	

Outcome

Sustainable and reliable access to quality fresh water.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
Finalise and implement a water security plan.	Deliver the preferred water security plan actions once they are adopted in June 2026.	



Pūnaha waka tītike Optimised transport system

Maintain an integrated, safe and efficient transport system to improve mobility and equity, reduce emissions and support regional productivity.

Transport is the backbone of regional connectivity and economic growth. A reliable and efficient transport system is essential to connect people to jobs, education, people and services, move goods reliably and reduce emissions. By shaping a future-focused network, we can improve accessibility, enhance safety and support a thriving regional economy while protecting the environment.



Outcome

A transport network that supports economic development by efficiently moving freight and people, enhances social wellbeing and ensures equitable access to essential services.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
<p>With our stakeholders, develop the next iteration of <i>Mahere Waka ā-Rohe o Waikato Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan</i> for the period 2027-2057.</p>	<p>Deliver actions and measures identified in the current regional land transport (2024-2054) and public transport (2022-2032) plans.</p> <p>Adopt <i>Mahere Waka ā-Rohe o Waikato Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2027-2057</i>.</p> <p>Recognition and funding for Waikato's needs is included in the 2027 <i>Government Policy Statement on land transport</i>.</p> <p>The <i>Rail Network Investment Programme</i> for 2027 includes actions and funding to resolve Waikato rail constraints and build rail capacity.</p>	
<p>Integrate land use and transport, providing support for housing growth.</p> <p>Collaborate with Future Proof partners.</p>	<p>Priority strategic corridors (road and rail) are optimised.</p> <p>Deliver transport-related projects identified in the Hamilton-Waikato Metropolitan Spatial Plan.</p>	
<p>With our stakeholders, advocate for improved route resilience on key strategic corridors.</p>	<p>As set out in the regional land transport plan, the number of unplanned state highway closures is reduced by 10 per cent.</p>	

Outcome

An environmentally sustainable, energy efficient and increasingly low carbon transport system that reduces overall environmental impacts.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
<p>Deliver low emission regional public transport and initiate public transport networks that enable people to move from private car trips.</p> <p>Reduce emissions from freight.</p>	<p>Enable, support and, where appropriate, deliver the transport requirements set out in the Government's <i>Emissions Reduction Plan</i>.</p>	

Outcome

A range of public and community transport options available that meet diverse access and mobility needs, reducing transport inequities and enabling transport-disadvantaged people and communities to travel safely, independently and reliably.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
<p>Improve transport accessibility and travel options to meet the mobility needs of transport-disadvantaged people and communities.</p> <p>Support community transport initiatives.</p>	<p>Waikato Regional Council increases public transport and active mode share by 2035 (from 2018 levels).</p> <p>By mid-2027, review and update the current strategy for community transport initiatives.</p>	<p>Groups of activities</p> 

Outcome

Recognising progress made over previous decades, advocate for and deliver a safe, accessible transport system where no-one is killed or seriously injured.

Our approach	Progress measures	Groups of activities
<p>Work with regional and national partners to advocate for investment in safety.</p>	<p>Update the <i>Waikato Regional Road Safety Strategy</i>, including identifying the target to reduce deaths and serious injury.</p>	<p>Groups of activities</p> 



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