

North Waipā – South Hamilton Spatial Study

A nationally significant opportunity and a critical moment to act.

The opportunity

North Waipā – South Hamilton represents one of the Upper North Island's most significant long-term economic development opportunities.

Anchored by Hamilton Airport and Mystery Creek and strategically located within the Golden Triangle, the area combines nationally significant transport, freight, aviation and employment assets with substantial future growth capacity. It presents a rare opportunity to establish a high-value employment, logistics and innovation hub that strengthens productivity, supports investment and creates jobs while complementing existing growth across Hamilton, Ruakura, Cambridge and Te Awamutu.

Development interest is accelerating, fast-track proposals are emerging across the wider sub-region, and key infrastructure investments are moving toward delivery. Growth is no longer a future possibility; it is already underway.

The question is not whether growth occurs, but whether it is coordinated to maximise long-term economic value or allowed to proceed in a way that increases infrastructure costs and constrains future opportunities.

Why action is needed now

There is a narrowing window to shape outcomes before growth pressures begin determining them.

Without coordinated planning and investment, development risks outpacing infrastructure capacity, resulting in fragmented growth patterns, higher servicing costs, reduced network performance and the loss of strategically important employment land.

Transport and wastewater infrastructure will play a critical role in shaping future growth outcomes. Decisions regarding Hamilton Southern Links, wastewater servicing and infrastructure funding pathways will influence the scale, timing and location of development across the area.

Environmental considerations—including highly productive land, peat systems, flood-prone areas and the Waikato River catchment—must also be integrated into growth decisions from the outset to protect long-term economic, environmental outcomes and maximise co-benefits.

The cost of inaction is not merely the absence of growth, which is likely to occur anyway, but rather growth that happens without coordination, resulting in higher long-term costs and lower economic returns.

A nationally significant economic proposition

This area has a unique combination of strategic assets and growth opportunities:

- Direct access to state highway and rail freight networks, and the wider Upper North Island supply chain spine.
- Hamilton International Airport and Mystery Creek as economic anchors with expansion and resilience roles.
- Proximity to major logistics platforms and the Hamilton metro economy, with strong labour market access.
- A scale opportunity to build an aviation-compatible employment node and integrated logistics and innovation corridor, complementing (not competing with) Hamilton central city, Ruakura, Cambridge and Te Awamutu.
- Proximity to existing and planned residential growth areas, providing access to labour, supporting housing supply and enabling integrated employment and community development outcomes.

What needs to happen next

The next 10 years are critical. This period should focus on establishing the conditions for success rather than assuming the form and shape of the end delivery.

Immediate priorities include:

1. Confirm Airport shareholders' (Councils') expectations for Waikato Regional Airport Limited (WRAL) and Titanium Park Limited.
2. Initiate Economic Hub precinct master planning as an entry point to the Regional Spatial Plan.

3. Convene a Strategic Economic Hub symposium.
4. Prioritise Highly Productive Land (HPL) and peat mapping as key considerations in the Regional Spatial Plan process.
5. Embed infrastructure triggers, sequencing and investment in statutory and investment planning instruments, including the Regional Spatial Plan, long-term plans and the Regional Land Transport Plan.

Beyond the first 10 years, implementation should shift from alignment and planning toward staged delivery and benefit realisation.

This will depend on the resolution of key infrastructure, funding, statutory, environmental, and market conditions.

The longer-term approach should include:

1. Integrating the agreed spatial direction into successive Regional Spatial Plans, Land Use Plans, Long Term Plans, Regional Land Transport Plans, Water services strategies and growth strategies;
2. Monitoring infrastructure triggers, land demand, market uptake, environmental thresholds, and development feasibility;
3. Reviewing whether existing governance and coordination arrangements remain fit for purpose;
4. Identifying funding and financing pathways where infrastructure investment becomes necessary and justified; and
5. Ensuring that development continues to support the agreed regional economic role of the area.

The case for action

The opportunity is substantial, but it is also time-sensitive.

Decisions made over the coming decade will determine whether North Waipā – South Hamilton evolves as a coordinated economic hub that supports productivity, investment and jobs, or whether fragmented growth limits its long-term potential.

A clear pathway exists for Government, infrastructure providers, iwi and mana whenua, asset owners and investors to align decisions, sequence investment and unlock nationally significant economic outcomes. Realising this opportunity will require deliberate coordination, timely investment and a shared commitment to long-term outcomes.

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Strategic Interventions



Legend

..... Hamilton Southern Links designation

■ Areas of interest

..... North Island Main Trunk (NIMT)

■ Waikato River

— State Highways

— Other roads

Proposed Strategic Interventions

■ Economic hub: Initial stage

■ Economic hub: Area for future consideration

■ Residential - Infrastructure-ready

■ Residential - Under investigation

■ Residential - Long-term growth direction

■ Investigate the protection of Highly Productive Land and peat

■ Embed environmental framework considering green infrastructure as core infrastructure

■ Prioritise direct freight access to the Airport

■ Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) connecting to Peacocke and the Airport (indicative)

■ Frequent bus services corridors serving surrounding growth areas

■ Integrate active mode corridors and green infrastructure (indicative)

■ Identify and protect strategic Park & Ride locations near the Airport and Mystery Creek