

Te Tau Tiitoki Puuronga aa Tau Future Proof Annual Report

2025



Future Proof
Te Tau Titoki



Working **together** to future proof our communities

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Tirohanga ki Tua Introducing Future Proof

Future Proof is a collaborative partnership of iwi, local government and central government agencies that work together to ensure growth in the Waikato sub-region is managed in a way to provide the very best outcomes for our communities.

The Future Proof partnership sets out how we will grow and change over the next 30 years. It ensures we are working collaboratively, and across geographic boundaries, so we can develop an economically successful, socially responsible, and environmentally leading thriving Waikato sub-region that supports and enhances growth in the broader region.

Future Proof considers all of the major growth challenges impacting the sub-region. Already, 369,000 people call the Waikato sub-region home. Over the next 30 years, we're expecting another 180,000 people will settle here – a population increase of 30 per cent in just three decades.

- We will need to make way for another 66,000 houses in our urban areas alone.
- We need to plan for a comprehensive and fundamental evolution of our transport system.
- We must remain focused on delivering thriving communities and neighbourhoods.

Future Proof leads a complex programme of work that links our planning to the construction of the infrastructure we require to enable our communities to thrive. This work is vitally important for the sub-region and for the future of New Zealand overall.



Waahinga Koorero Foreword

The Future Proof partnership was established in 2007 to tackle the complex challenges of growth in the Waikato sub-region. It continues to be nationally acknowledged for its credibility, cohesion and commitment to long-term planning and implementation.

Our strength endures because of the way we work together – central and local government, mana whenua, and key partners – all focused on delivering a clear and agreed settlement pattern that meets the needs of our diverse populations.

While many of the fundamentals associated with growth remained unchanged, this past year brought additional challenges into stark focus.

There was a major shift in government priorities for transport funding, and this created a number of challenges for our partners. There was also continued pressure to resolve national infrastructure challenges around water.

Here in the Waikato, we supported the creation of two water entities, Waikato Water Ltd and IAWAI – Flowing Waters. While each is a separate Council Controlled Organisation, regional leaders have made it clear that each entity will support the other with the potential to join as one in the future. That alone will have a significant impact on our sub-region in the decades ahead.

In the meantime, the intent for wide-ranging planning system reforms was well socialised during the year. We have sought to be well-informed on these changes and where possible, influence decision-making at a national level. Our actions have been grounded in the resilience and clarity of regional leaders whose passionate and collaborative efforts on behalf of the region have been noted by a range of government stakeholders.

Over the past year, Future Proof underwent a purposeful refresh—resetting our focus on implementation. We know the value of any strategy lies in its delivery; that is where our attention has been and will continue to be.

Looking ahead to the new local government triennium beginning in October 2025, our priority is maintaining momentum. We are also preparing for new regional spatial planning requirements and will work collaboratively to ensure Future Proof’s role evolves in line with legislative reforms.

At the same time, we remain committed to actively building stronger partnerships, including with the private and infrastructure sectors, and effective engagement and relationships with key stakeholders. Aligning sub-regional aspirations with real-world investment is critical as is taking a wider regional and inter-regional perspective.

We continue to develop our relationship with other areas such as Auckland and the SmartGrowth partnership in the Western Bay of Plenty and undertake initiatives such as the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor Spatial Study. This work enables us to look beyond our boundaries to understand and plan for spatial outcomes as the transport corridors are upgraded, providing a catalyst for further development in the future.

More than ever, we need certainty around funding for critical infrastructure. Our region will need at least 66,000 more houses in urban areas over the next 30 years. That reality demands bold thinking, and a united front. We are mindful of the Government’s Going for Growth programme and support its intent to help solve New Zealand’s housing shortage, but also ensuring we are building strong communities.

The Future Proof partnership is one of the country’s most enduring and effective sub-regional growth alliances. As the Waikato’s importance to the national economy grows, the way our growth is managed will directly influence New Zealand’s future success.

Now more than ever, it is vital we continue to demonstrate the value of our collaboration.

Bill Wasley
Independent Chair, Future Proof



Te whakatakoto i te waahi Setting the scene

Future Proof has a clear strategy but is agile and excels in working across a dynamic environment, including policy and legislative change.

The Future Proof Strategy is a 30 year growth management and implementation plan for the Hamilton, Waipā, Waikato and Matamata-Piako sub-region. The Strategy was updated in 2024 and helps manage growth in a staged and co-ordinated way while addressing complex planning issues.

A number of changes in government direction have impacted Future Proof during the 2024/25 year, and will continue to do so in future years.



Fast Track Consenting

The government introduced a new Act in 2024 on fast track consenting which draws on previous fast-track regimes and prioritises regionally and nationally significant infrastructure and development projects. It contains a process for the responsible Government Minister to refer projects for acceptance into the fast track process, and prioritises those projects to have their approvals granted. It is a 'one-stop shop' process for approvals under a range of legislation, including the RMA.

A number of developments within the sub-region have successfully been referred for Fast Track consenting – presenting the region with a great opportunity, however some of these developments are not aligned with the settlement pattern and the infrastructure for most is not currently funded by either Councils or central government.



Going for Growth

The Government has announced a Going for Growth programme as part of its plan to tackle New Zealand's housing shortage. It is structured around three pillars that make system changes to address the underlying causes of the housing supply shortage.

These are:

1. Freeing up land for urban development, including removing unnecessary planning barriers.
2. Improving infrastructure funding and financing to support urban growth.
3. Providing incentives for communities and councils to support growth.

Together, these three pillars aim to improve housing affordability by significantly increasing the supply of developable land for housing, both inside and at the edge of our urban areas.

These initiatives present real opportunities for the region to grow housing supply and improve housing affordability.



Regional Deals

The Government launched a framework to establish Regional Deals between central and local government with a focus on economic growth and productivity, delivering resilient critical infrastructure, and improving the supply of affordable, quality housing.

Regional Deals will be used to help coordinate capital investment between central and local government and will also be a tool to enable regions to utilise new and existing funding tools to fund and finance this infrastructure.

A Regional Deal that includes the Future Proof partnership could assist in developing an enduring consensus with central government on the actions required to drive prosperity in the region.



A replacement act for the Resource Management Act (RMA)

Central government is preparing a Bill/s to replace the RMA with new resource management legislation based on the enjoyment of property rights, while ensuring good environmental outcomes. These reforms include proposals to separate urban/spatial planning from environmental protection.

As one of the few enduring spatial plans in the region, Future Proof positions the Waikato well to transition into the new regulatory framework.



Local Water Done Well

Local Water Done Well is the Government's plan to address New Zealand's long-standing water infrastructure challenges. It recognises the importance of local decision-making and flexibility for communities and councils to determine how their water services will be delivered in the future.

The Waikato has embraced this opportunity with the creation of two CCOs – IAWAI Flowing Waters and Waikato Waters Ltd, both of which will be fully operational from 1 July 2026.



Ngāa whakatutukinga matua Key achievements and outcomes

Future Proof continued to make significant achievements over the past year, based around seven transformational moves for change. These seven transformational moves provide the 'why' behind all that Future Proof does and provides the platform for the Future Proof work programmes.

The transformational moves are:

- Iwi aspirations.
- Waikato River – giving effect to Te Ture Whaimana.
- A comprehensive and fundamental evolution of our transport system.
- A vibrant metro core and lively metropolitan and town centres.
- Strong and productive economic corridors.
- Thriving communities and neighbourhoods.
- Water wise and water sensitive communities.

Future Proof has four key work programmes:

- Policy and planning
- Priority Development Areas
- Transport
- Waters

Policy and planning

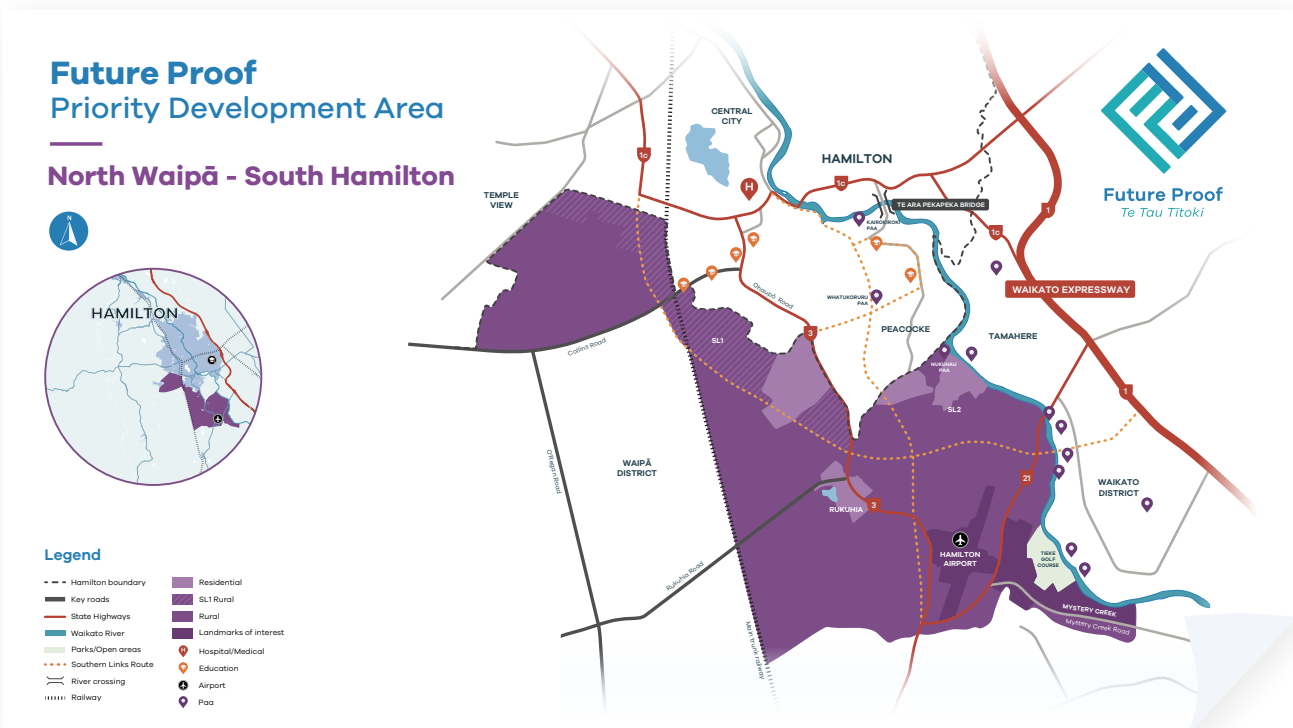
Building communities and creating liveable areas is about ensuring there is a range of housing options available for a diverse population as well as land that enables strong, productive business. It’s critical both our housing and businesses are supported by quality community infrastructure, open space and recreation areas.

Grounded by:

- Iwi aspirations.
- Waikato River – Giving effect to Te Ture Whaimana.
- A vibrant metro core and lively metropolitan and town centres.
- Strong and productive economic corridors.
- Thriving communities and neighbourhoods.
- Nearing completion of the retirement living study to better understand retirement living demand and supply in the sub-region.
- Substantially progressed spatial studies for the Hamilton to Tauranga corridor and the North Waipā Priority Development Area (PDA).
- Establishment and ongoing work of the Fast Track Action Team to facilitate Future Proof proactively working with fast track applicants with the aim of aligning their proposals with Future Proof’s development principles and the partners’ infrastructure investment plans.

Policy and planning achievements over the past 12 months:

- Adoption of the first Annual Implementation Plan for the Future Development Strategy.



Spotlight
Spatial Studies

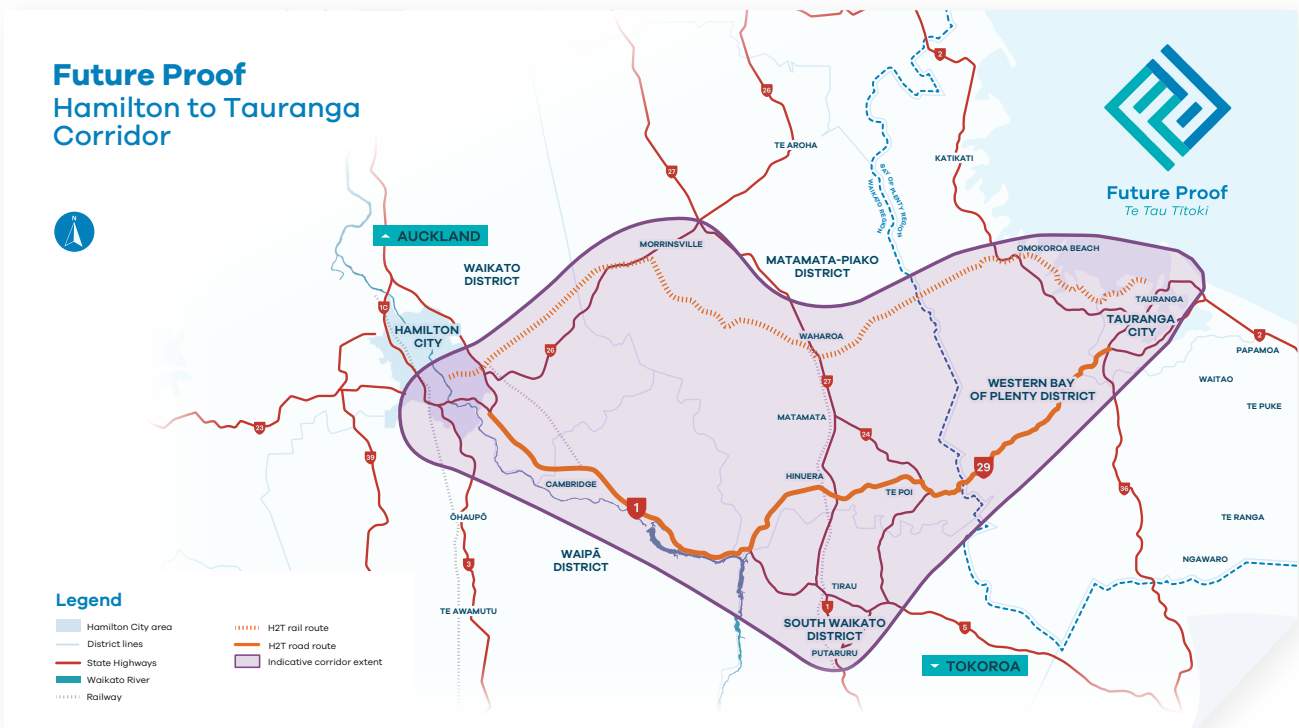
As part of the Future Proof Strategy development, Future Proof partners agreed that further information was required to consider the potential in the areas between North Waipā and South Hamilton and in the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor.

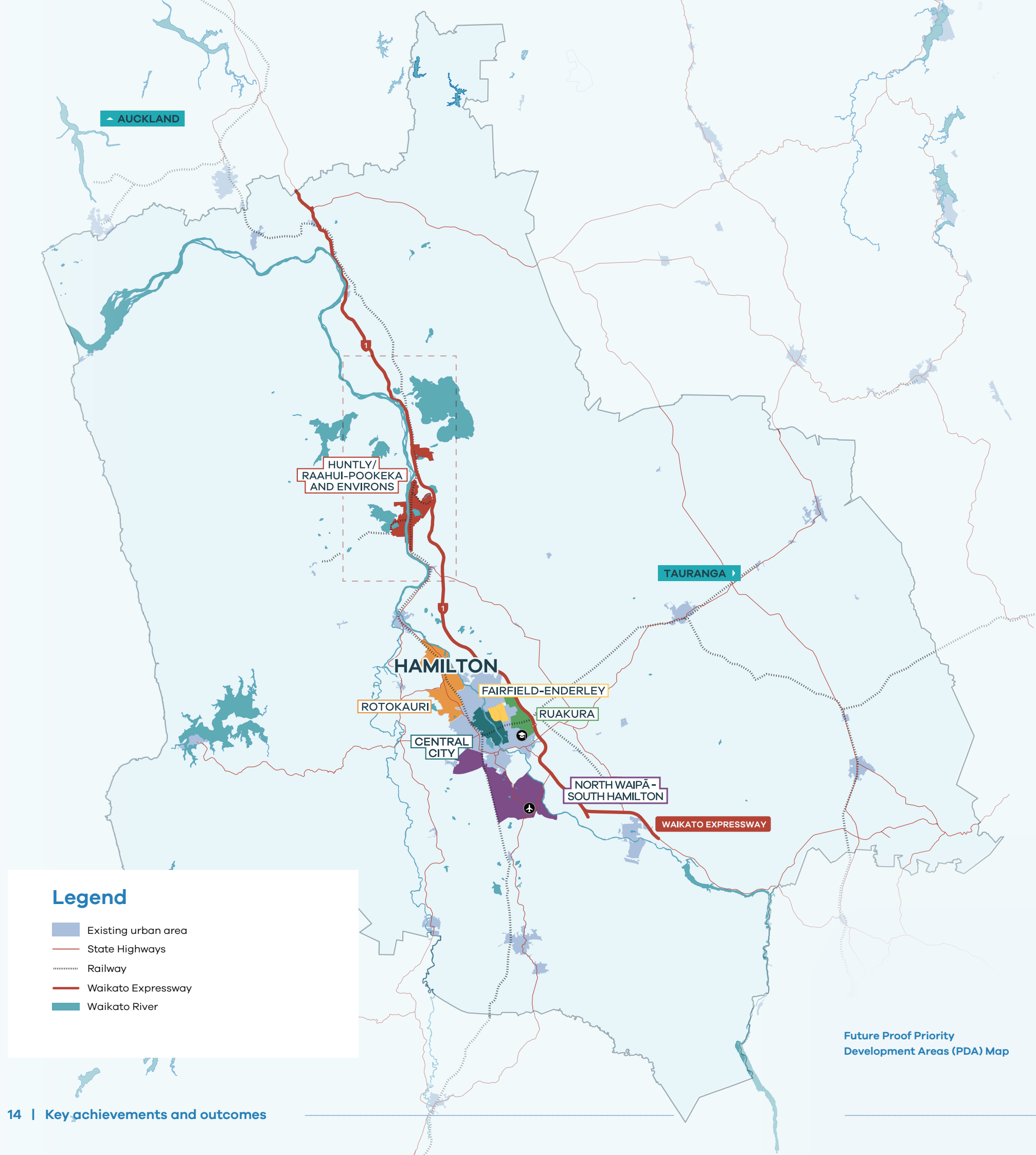
Two spatial studies are currently underway and at the time of printing the Annual Report, the first phase of engagement has been completed.

Both studies will outline the key land use and infrastructure investments

needed to develop the areas. Future Proof seeks an understanding of the aspirations that people have for this area including an overview of the development that’s already planned, as well as development that has been proposed, but not yet agreed to or confirmed.

A series of scenarios will be tested amongst Future Proof partners and key stakeholders and will be used to inform the Future Proof Development Strategy to be reviewed in 2026.





Priority Development Areas

Priority Development Areas (PDAs) have been identified in the northern, central and southern Hamilton to Auckland corridors. PDAs provide a focus on connecting key areas of the sub-region while supporting the core elements of transport, city centres, the proposed economic corridor, and planned intensification.

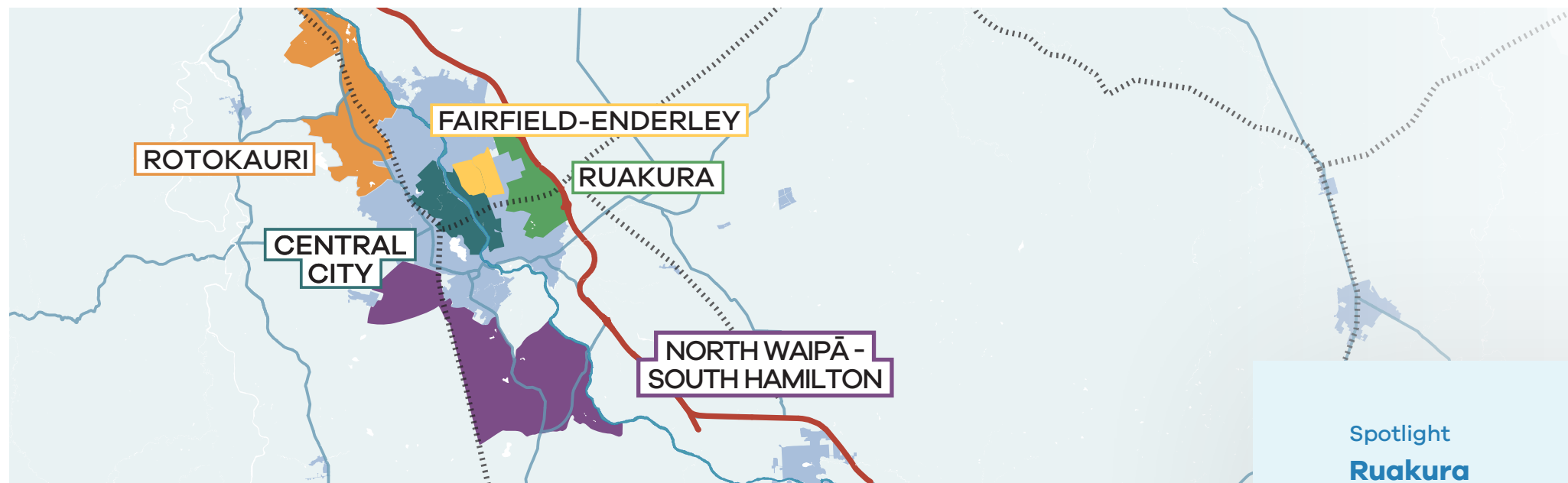
Grounded by:

- Iwi aspirations.
- Waikato River – Giving effect to Te Ture Whaimana.
- A vibrant metro core and lively metropolitan and town centres.
- Thriving communities and neighbourhoods.

The current focus Priority Development Areas (PDAs) are:

1. Huntly/Raahui-Pookeka and environs
2. Rotokauri
3. Hamilton Central City
4. Ruakura
5. Fairfield-Enderley
6. North Waipā – South Hamilton

Future Proof Priority Development Areas (PDA) Map



Priority Development Areas achievements over the past 12 months:

- Focus has been on continuing to explore the use of funding and financing tools, including private investment to unlock key areas.
- Simplified and prioritised the PDAs.
- Creation of a new suite of maps to support subregional value proposition and alignment.
- Continuous improvement of trackers, introducing new metrics to improve reporting and enabling us to resolve barriers as they arise.
- A number of fast track applications are underway within Priority Development Areas (Huntly WWTP, Te Awa Lakes, Ruakura 2, Southern Links, SL1) with more anticipated.
- Progression of Rotokauri Stage 1 through private developer agreement.
- Continued delivering Infrastructure Acceleration Fund Crown grant for critical infrastructure for Hamilton Central City.
- Progressing government investment in the Ruakura Eastern Transport Corridor and Waikato Medical School projects.

Spotlight Ruakura

Unlocking Ruakura’s development potential took another step forward during the year when the NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi Board endorsed a business case for the Ruakura Eastern Transport Corridor work, signing off \$4.1 million to complete consenting and detailed design.

The work, when completed, will see a four-lane freight corridor connecting the Ruakura Inland Port, enabling completion of the Port while also unlocking residential and commercial land for the Ruakura Superhub.

A 2024 Future Proof study found that parts of the Hamilton roading network will soon be unable to accommodate the expected increases in traffic, causing extended periods of peak hour congestion.

The study found the delays could cause disruptions to 42 per cent of national freight volumes jeopardising the generation of more than half of

New Zealand’s GDP. This investment will help mitigate these impacts although more work transport changes will be required to avoid growing congestion issues.

The Ruakura Eastern Transport Corridor will enable ‘the golden triangle’ – Auckland, Tauranga and Hamilton – to continue to provide freight corridors for the most economically significant part of New Zealand.

The Ruakura Superhub development sits on land owned by Tainui Group Holdings and services around 45 per cent of New Zealand’s population, 42 per cent of the nation’s freight and 55 per cent of the country’s GDP.

The 30ha inland port is connected via rail to Auckland’s port and the Port of Tauranga.



Transport

Our fast growing population means more people on our roads and more people needing connectivity.

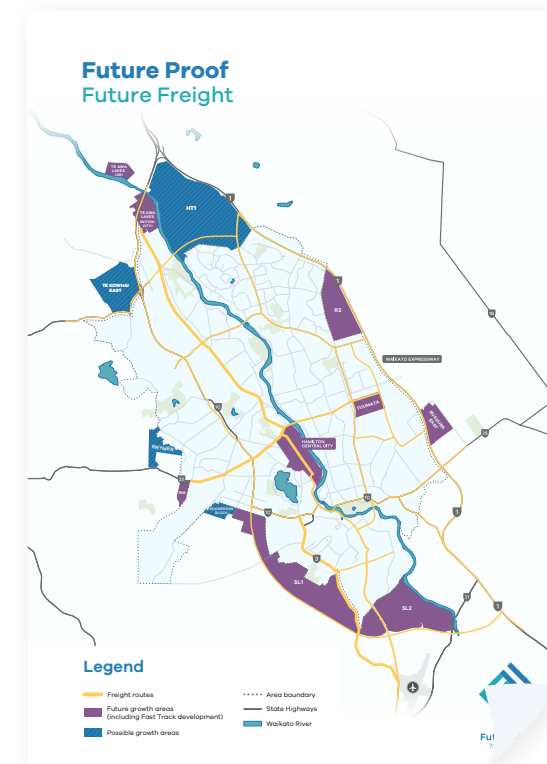
Simply building more roads is not an option – space is limited and it's unaffordable. Agencies are already working to cut congestion, reduce carbon emissions, and provide people and businesses with choices to get around safely, easily and efficiently.

Grounded by:

- Iwi aspirations.
- A comprehensive and fundamental evolution of our transport system.
- A vibrant metro core and lively metropolitan and town centres.
- Strong and productive economic corridors.
- Thriving communities and neighbourhoods.

Transport achievements over the past 12 months:

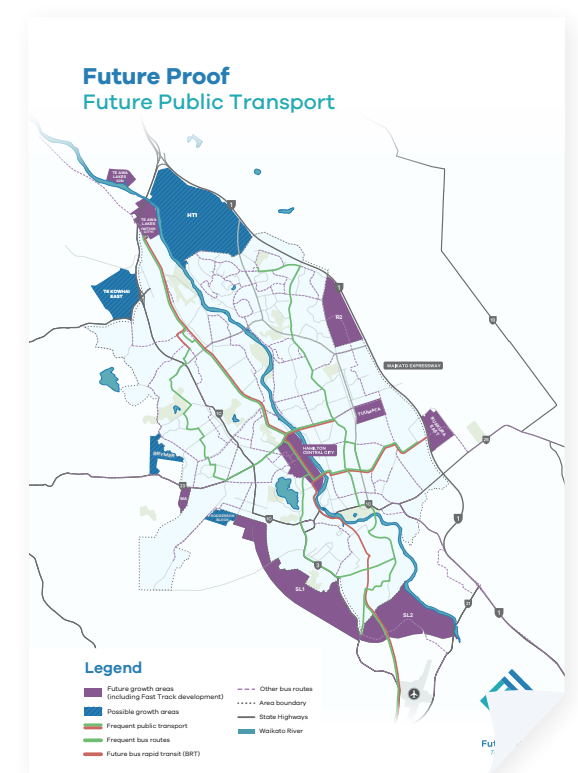
- A Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) Proof of Concept Study was completed with the purpose being to provide confidence among stakeholders and Future Proof partners that a BRT concept is technically feasible in Hamilton and to broadly define what a fit-for-purpose BRT would involve from a physical and operational perspective.



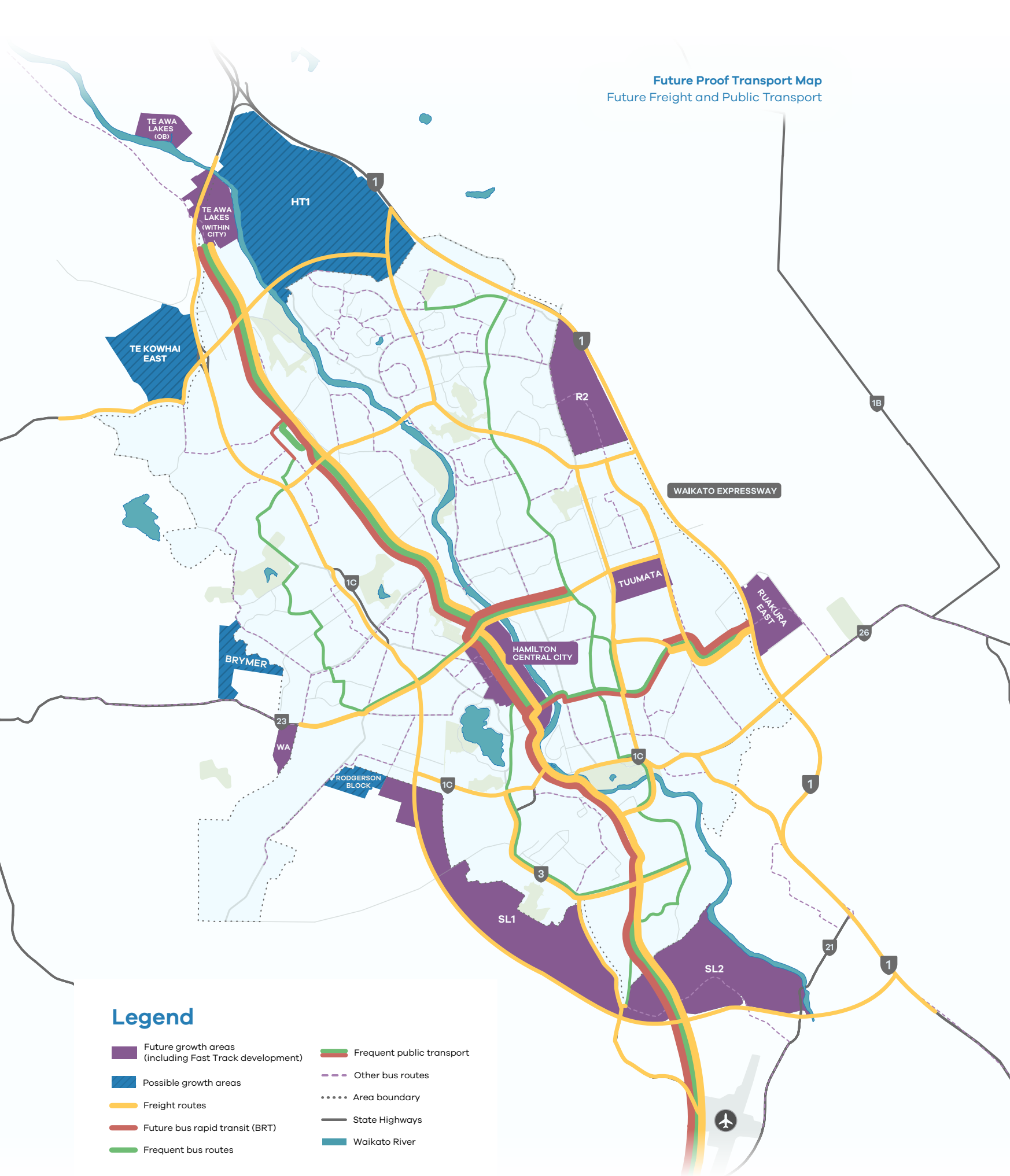
Future Proof Transport Map
Future Freight

- Completed the Freight and Logistics Study. This study provides us with more understanding about both current and future freight movements, needs and impacts.
- Completed the Public Transport Pathways Study. This study aimed at aligning public transport infrastructure with growth and public transport services. The study looked for operational improvements to the public transport network recommended introducing peak and more frequent off-peak bus services between towns.

- Continued to work very closely with NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi on ongoing Hamilton Southern Links Investment Case.
- Continued with the integration of our future bus network thinking into our strategic transport modelling.
- Further developed our Park and Ride strategic planning and consideration of future bus power requirements / fleet composition.



Future Proof Transport Map
Future Public Transport



Spotlight Southern Links

Waka Kotahi NZTA) is developing a plan to deliver the state highway component of Hamilton Southern Links, an effective network of state highway and urban arterial routes to support Hamilton's planned southern growth into Waipā.

It will link SH1 from Kahikatea Drive to the Waikato Expressway at Tamahere, and SH3 from Hamilton Airport to central and east Hamilton. There are 11km of local arterials and 21kms of state highway along with associated infrastructure, activities and works.

Hamilton Southern Links is an important part of the sub-regional settlement pattern and a long term transport vision would provide

significant economic, transport and urban development benefits to the sub-region and Waikato.

All Future Proof partners are fully committed to supporting NZTA to prepare a successful investment case that highlights these benefits and gives Hamilton Southern Links the best chance of success. Future Proof's major focus is ensuring that a network approach is taken to the Investment Case so that Southern Links integrates effectively with our existing and planned network improvements (including public transport, walking and cycling) necessary to support our planned land use.





Waters

The sustainable delivery and management of three waters (drinking water, wastewater and stormwater) is a key focus area for Future Proof.

As well as identifying future infrastructure needs, Future Proof is also working in partnership with iwi and hapu to ensure tangata whenua values, aspirations and interests are identified and reflected and to ensure protection and enhancement of our natural environment.

Our role is not to determine the delivery model for the future of three waters but to provide the integrated planning and investment required to grow our communities safely and sustainably.

Grounded by:

- Iwi aspirations.
- Waikato River – Giving effect to Te Ture Whaimana.
- Water wise and water sensitive communities.

Policy and planning achievements over the past 12 months:

- **Cambridge Wastewater Treatment Plant**
Led by Waipā District Council, the construction of the new Cambridge Wastewater Treatment Plant is underway and is a key part of the Sub-regional Waters Strategy. The plant is on track to be completed in 2026 and will include an on-site solar farm, generating enough energy to power the plant during the day. It will also consider visual impact, noise, and odour management plus meet the highest quality effluent standards. Biosolids produced by the plant will be taken off-site for re-use as compost via a third-party.

Spotlight

Local Water Done Well

Future Proof has continued to support councils to develop their waters services delivery plans and models. Within the Future Proof sub-region, two Council Controlled Organisations (CCOs) have been developed, IAWAI – Flowing Waters and Waikato Water Ltd.

While the CCOs are not Future Proof initiatives and expand beyond our sub-region, they are incredibly positive examples of our approach to collaboration and planning beyond our boundaries in order to get the best outcomes for our environment, our communities, and our people.

Haere Whakamua Looking ahead



Since its inception, Future Proof has worked diligently to ensure our sub-region is in the best possible position to tackle the changes coming our way. During that time, we have responded to changing government priorities and growth that has, at times, been greater than forecast.

Our strong and stable partnership has allowed us to commit to a clear strategy, and to review that strategy as needed. Our collaborative approach has meant we have been able, over many years, to respond constructively to government interventions including most recently, fast-track legislation.

However, it is clear that local government will look different in the future than it does now. There is a growing sense of disquiet that the structure of local government in New Zealand, and particularly its funding mechanisms, are no longer fit for purpose. To meet the needs of changing communities, local government will also be required to change.

While that will have an obvious impact on how local government works, the Future Proof partnership as a whole remains committed to the health and well-being of our sub-region and to supporting change we know is necessary.

That means actively supporting the new structures set up in our sub-region to build and manage water and wastewater infrastructure. It also means preprioritising and progressing initiatives to optimise our transport network.

Importantly, we will need to be nimble and agile to meet new spatial planning requirements and respond to RMA reform.

Coupled with ongoing infrastructure funding challenges faced, this high-level of change will no doubt cause high pressure - even more so than the past. However, partnerships like Future Proof will need to continue to play an important role in preparing the region for the greatest success.

Future Proof has a clear long-term strategy and while our vision will not change, how we get there will need to flex to suit. We're ready and open to that and look forward to tackling these challenges together and to continue advocating for the people we serve.





Our Future Proof Partners are:

Local government

- Waikato Regional Council
- Waipā District Council
- Waikato District Council
- Hamilton City Council
- Matamata-Piako District Council
- Auckland Council (in relation to the Hamilton-Auckland corridor)

Central government

- NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
- Kāinga Ora
- Ministry of Transport
- Department of Internal Affairs
- Ministry for the Environment
- Te Whatu Ora Health NZ Waikato

Iwi

- Ngā Karu Atua o te Waka
- Waikato-Tainui
- Tainui Waka Alliance
- Mana Whenua Kaitiaki Forum (in relation to the Hamilton-Auckland corridor)
- Tangata Whenua



Future Proof
Te Tau Tītoki

futureproof.org.nz