Scenario 5: Environmental gateway

At a glance

- Development is deliberately compact, staged, and environmentally led. Competitive land markets can be achieved elsewhere in the subregion, and in this scenario, this is an area where development occurs in a way that ensures the protection of environmental and ecological resources.
- Te Ture Whaimana and Te Mana o te Wai are given full effect, with blue-green networks, riparian buffers, and restored wetlands shaping the urban footprint. High-class soils and Significant Natural Areas are strongly protected, and farm environmental plans limit intensification.
- Stormwater management is fully integrated with blue-green corridors, wetland systems, and riparian restoration. Onsite wastewater is limited to efficient and environmentally friendly systems.
- Industrial activity focuses on clean tech, circular economy industries, and eco-tourism. There is limited opportunity for wet industries as determined by the capacity limits of the recycled water available from the Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- By 2055, the Airport, Ruakura, and Mystery Creek operate as a green super-node, delivering jobs while measurably contributing to improving the health of the Waikato River.

Scenario Elements – Key assumptions

Scenario elements	Key assumptions	
	By 2040	By 2055
Anticipated Regulatory Environment and Population Projections	• Scenario approach diverges from the competitive land-release approach anticipated under the Going for Housing Growth reforms. It engages in a masterplanning process to effectively coordinate all stakeholders involved, including landowners, developers, and representatives from the Central Government. Growth and industry here are shaped first and foremost by the health of the Waikato River and its tributaries, and the long-term value of highly productive land. Spatial planning tools are retained, and infrastructure is used as the primary trigger for release, but with a deliberate bias toward environmental protection. • A mechanism, such as Special Economic Zone (SEZ) that incentivise green industries, will be require to implement the "green industrial super node" aspirations. • Development, from compact housing to agricultural innovation hubs, is designed to ensure enhanced water quality, protect mauri, and restore riparian and wetland systems. • While growth is still possible and enabled at the sub-regional level, the land is protected, and development is restricted. Te Ture Whaimana's long-term progress toward the 80-year water quality targets is well advanced. Allocation regimes have tightened with new rules, and regimes for allocating rights to discharge contaminants have been in place. The coordination of farm environmental plans and increased control over land use changes have prevented further intensification of land use, leading to a reduction in diffuse discharges of contaminants in the Waikato and Waipā rivers and tributaries. • Development on highly productive land is tightly limited, with key agricultural and horticultural areas protected.	
Residential / Industrial / Commercial development	• Despite **SL1** fast-tracked areas, constructibility challenges have slowed down the delivery of the residential and industrial sites as per the initial concept plan. Fast-tracked and balanced areas in SL1, as well as the area north of Collins Road, are unlikely to be progressed. • Given the above, residential growth pressure shifts into **Peacocke**, which develops at medium density (35–45 dph) and at a faster pace, and incorporates mixed-use and retail offerings, centres aligned with public transport routes. • A **green belt** now encircles the Airport, towns, and villages, preserving Waipā's rural character and ecological corridors, providing secondary stormwater management during extreme storm events and increasing flood resilience. • The acquisition and maintenance costs are covered through an environmentally focussed funding mechanism such as a green rate. There are development levy discounts for water-sensitive design. • **Rukuhia and Ōhaupō** growth cells are reconsidered to provide larger environmental buffers, especially around peat lakes, and retain their village character with only limited intensification.	• By 2055, **SL1** and **north of Collins Road area** development have been placed on hold. Developers have moved to other areas that are more affordable and easier to develop close to and within Hamilton. • **SL2** remains largely untouched, functioning as a green buffer with integrated water management systems. Limited residential development is still taking place along the river. Investigations are underway to acquire properties and develop a large swale to be used as a pre-treatment areas tempering and filtering flow before channeling to Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant. • **Rukuhia** and then **Ōhaupō** are evolving into fully reticulated larger villages (15–25 dwellings per hectare) with development occurring along SH3, yet retaining a compact, walkable, village feel. • The **Airport, Ruakura, and Mystery Creek** operate as a coordinated "green industrial super node" — home to global agri-tech, sustainable food production, and research ventures in partnership with the University of Waikato, Waikato Tainui and mana whenua enterprises. All activities meet or exceed Te Ture Whaimana objectives, with regular monitoring measuring gains in river health.

Scenario Elements – Key assumptions (continued)

Scenario elements	Key assumptions	
	By 2040	By 2055
Residential / Industrial / Commercial development (continued)	• **SL2** area has been held back from development, it remains rural with green infrastructure and catchment buffers. • The **Airport** has emerged as an international gateway and an eco-destination, reinforcing the vision which has long been carried by the Waikato Destination Management Plan, hosting small-scale eco-retail, green logistics, and events. Operations are managed to minimise carbon emissions, with all aviation activities offset and sustainability embedded in day-to-day practices. Industrial activity is limited to clean-tech manufacturing, agri-tech innovation, some of which are looking to reuse water from the Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant as it becomes operational, and circular-economy industries. Eco-retail and eco-tourism linked to the airport are emerging. • **Mystery Creek** has become both a key access point to the Waikato River and a significant stop along the Te Awa Cycleway. The national equestrian centre is looking to relocate here, benefiting from the setting and connectivity. • The area is experiencing growth in the farmstay and farm experience tourism niche, attracting both national and international visitors. There is also an opportunity for greater linkage with Maungatautari Ecological Island. The growth in hospitality, accommodation, and eco-based tourism is being led by Iwi. • Industrial and residential sprawl is contained within key development areas. Farming activities in the study area are maintained similarly to Scenario 2.	• The multi-model node offers a vital connection to other regions, making it an ideal hub for adventure seekers looking to connect and explore.
Infrastructure - Water	• Green gateway has become part of the CCO's business development vision, and the first stages of the **Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant** have been advanced and are now operational. The plant is highly energy-efficient and requires pre-treatment before inflows. • **Stormwater** is managed through an interconnected green network, using swales, wetlands, and biofiltration. • **Wet industries** have been enabled in this scenario, however, they operate at limited capacity using recycled water from the Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant.	• All urbanised areas are either reticulated or will be to the advanced, energy-efficient **Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant,** with wastewater pre-treated on-site. • **Rainwater harvesting and greywater reuse** are standard in residential and commercial buildings.

Scenario Elements – Key assumptions (continued)

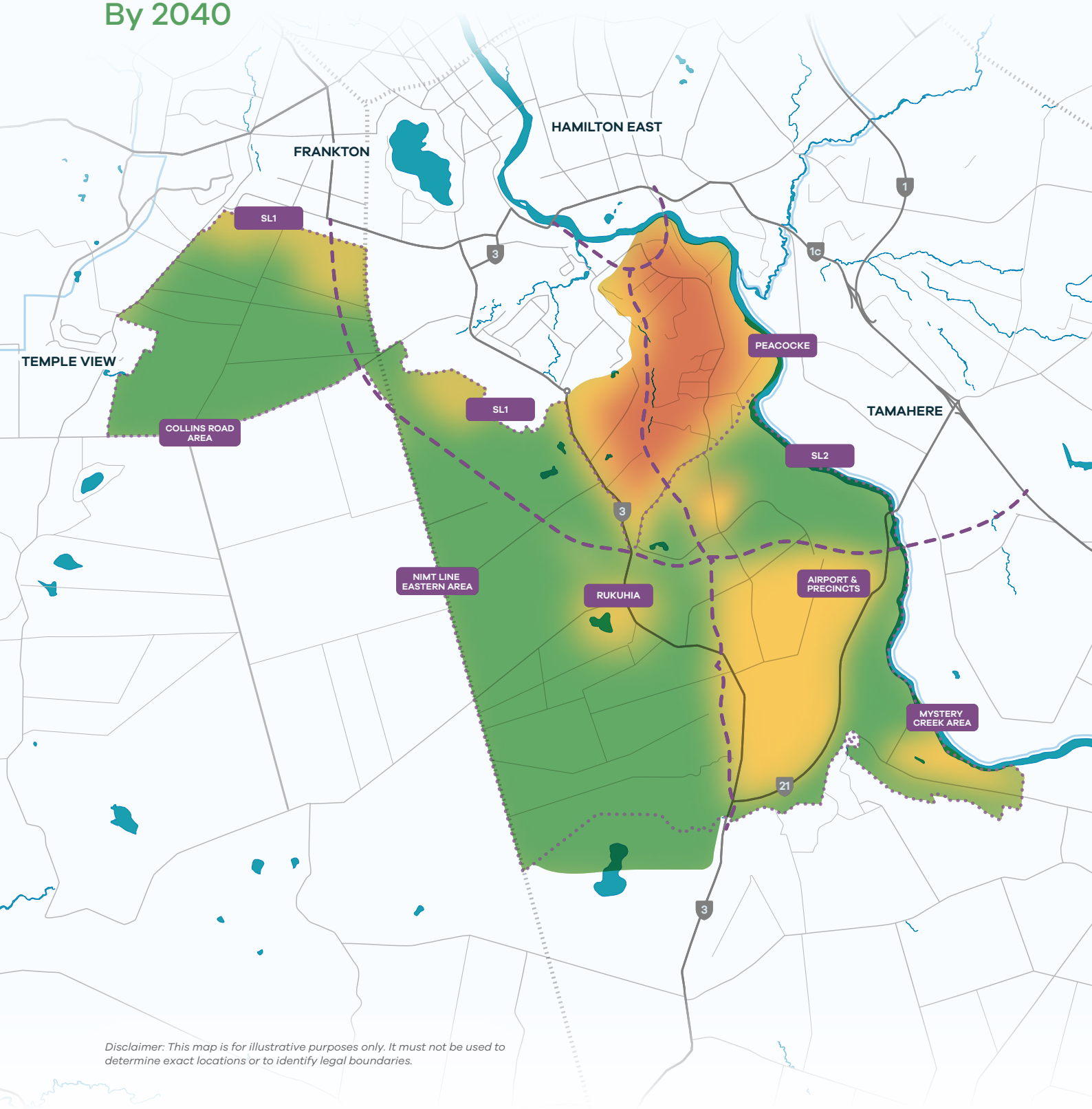
Scenario elements	Key assumptions	
	By 2040	By 2055
Infrastructure - Water (continued)	• Growing visitor numbers and new eco-accommodation at **Mystery Creek** are increasing demand for water, prompting investment in efficient water storage and reuse systems.	
Infrastructure - Transport	• **Hamilton Southern Links** is delivered in staged packages, embedding cycling and walking elements alongside road capacity. • Planning is underway to expand **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** services in response to intensification within its original catchment, connecting Hamilton CBD, the Airport and Te Awamutu. • Within the SEZ, transport investment prioritises low-carbon modes, with zero-emission freight fleets serving the Airport. Freight rail to the Airport is under early exploration. • All road and rail projects incorporate water-sensitive design to protect the river from runoff and sedimentation. • Cycling networks connect **Te Awa Ride** to the Waipā Cycling Network. Cycleways and walkways are co-located with gullies and wetlands, forming ecological and active transport corridors. These have become scenic cycling routes which connect eco-attractions.	• **BRT** is now fully scaled up, with high patronage and seamless connections to Cambridge, Te Awamutu, and Hamilton City Centre. • To enhance the overall travel experience, integrated transportation options have been added that facilitate seamless journeys. This includes ensuring **effective connections** for the first and last miles of travel, as well as providing adequate storage and changing facilities at destinations. • Public transport infrastructure now supports a fleet of electric buses, promoting eco-friendly travel to the sustainability-minded visitors. This is now all part of a wider Regional Eco Transport Plan focusing on sustainable practices that benefit the community and the environment. • **Freight rail** to the Airport is in early stage of construction with a focus on low-emissions transport. Consideration is also given to passenger rail between Hamilton Airport and Auckland. • SH3 provides the opportunity for bus priority and possibly BRT in the Hamilton City residential expansion areas. The revocation process should reflect this new road function.
Infrastructure - Social	• Investment in **local schools** has been staged and development has only occurred at one of the two originally planned Peacocke school sites due to earlier development in other areas. • **Community facilities** are delivered in step with population growth, designed as multi-use hubs integrating libraries, health services, and meeting spaces. • Outdoor recreation and open spaces are a key focus, with boardwalks, trails, and waterway reserves making them an everyday part of community life.	• **Green infrastructure** and public open space are core parts of neighbourhood design, doubling as flood resilience measures. • Demand for student places keeps pace with supply in the existing **school network,** requiring the second site in Peacocke and additional space at existing schools such as Rukuhia. • Education, recreation, and cultural facilities reflect design processes with mana whenua/iwi incorporating Maaori design principles and mātauranga Maaori.

Scenario Elements – Key assumptions (continued)

Scenario elements	Key assumptions	
	By 2040	By 2055
Environment / Heritage/ Culture	• The **blue-green network** is fully connected across Peacocke, Mystery Creek, and the Airport precinct. New wetlands, restored gullies, and continuous riparian planting link the maunga, peat lakes, and the Waikato River, which are actively monitored and enhanced in real time. • Long-tailed **bat habitats** are mapped, buffered, protected and actively enhanced. • All planning follows Te Mana o te Wai — prioritising the river's needs before human use. • Te Ture Whaimana and Tai Tumu Tai Pari Tai Ao is given full effect, guiding land-use decisions, industrial performance standards, and urban design. • Te Ao Maaori, cultural heritage and sites of significance are celebrated, with authentic partnership between mana whenua and council in both planning and day-to-day management. Built form, landscape, and water systems incorporate Maaori design principles and mātauranga Maaori, including reference to Tai Tumu Tai Pari Tai Ao.	• Continuous riparian planting runs along both sides of the river, tributaries, streams and gullies within the study area, water quality meets swimmable standards. Mahinga kai sites are re-established and accessible, reinforcing cultural and ecological values. Peat lakes are restored. • Improved benefits have been quantified and draws national and attention to the Agritech sectors. Farming continues, but only under strict controls preventing intensification, with a focus on regenerative, low-emission practices. Highly productive land close to urban centres is utilised for agriculture and horticultural research, and new high-yielding drought-resistant species are tested and utilised throughout the region. • The implementation of "Maaori-lived experiences" adds a unique cultural dimension, enriching visitors' understanding of the region's heritage and traditions.
Planning and Staging	• Planning processes integrate environmental triggers — new development is only released when it can be demonstrated that there will be no net loss in environmental quality, and ideally, a net gain. The blue-green network planning aligns with Future Proof blue-green network, and Taiao protection management is embedded as a mandatory first step in all new growth areas. • Competing interests between agriculture and natural biodiversity are resolved via integrating biodiversity into farm planning, promoting landholder buy-in through incentives and local ownership, adopting regenerative farming practices, fostering a cultural shift in what defines good farming through growth of tourism in nearby area, and utilising innovation and co-innovation to develop site-specific solutions from an Agri-tech hub.	• This scenario's defining principle is the restoration and protection of the Waikato River's health as the primary driver for all growth decisions, and the region is on track, if not ahead, toward meeting 80-year targets. • The **blue-green network,** as envisaged by Future Proof, is fully realised, ensuring that every new development contributes to the environmental, cultural, and social wellbeing of the awa and its communities.

Scenario Five: Environmental gateway

By 2040



Disclaimer: This map is for illustrative purposes only. It must not be used to determine exact locations or to identify legal boundaries.

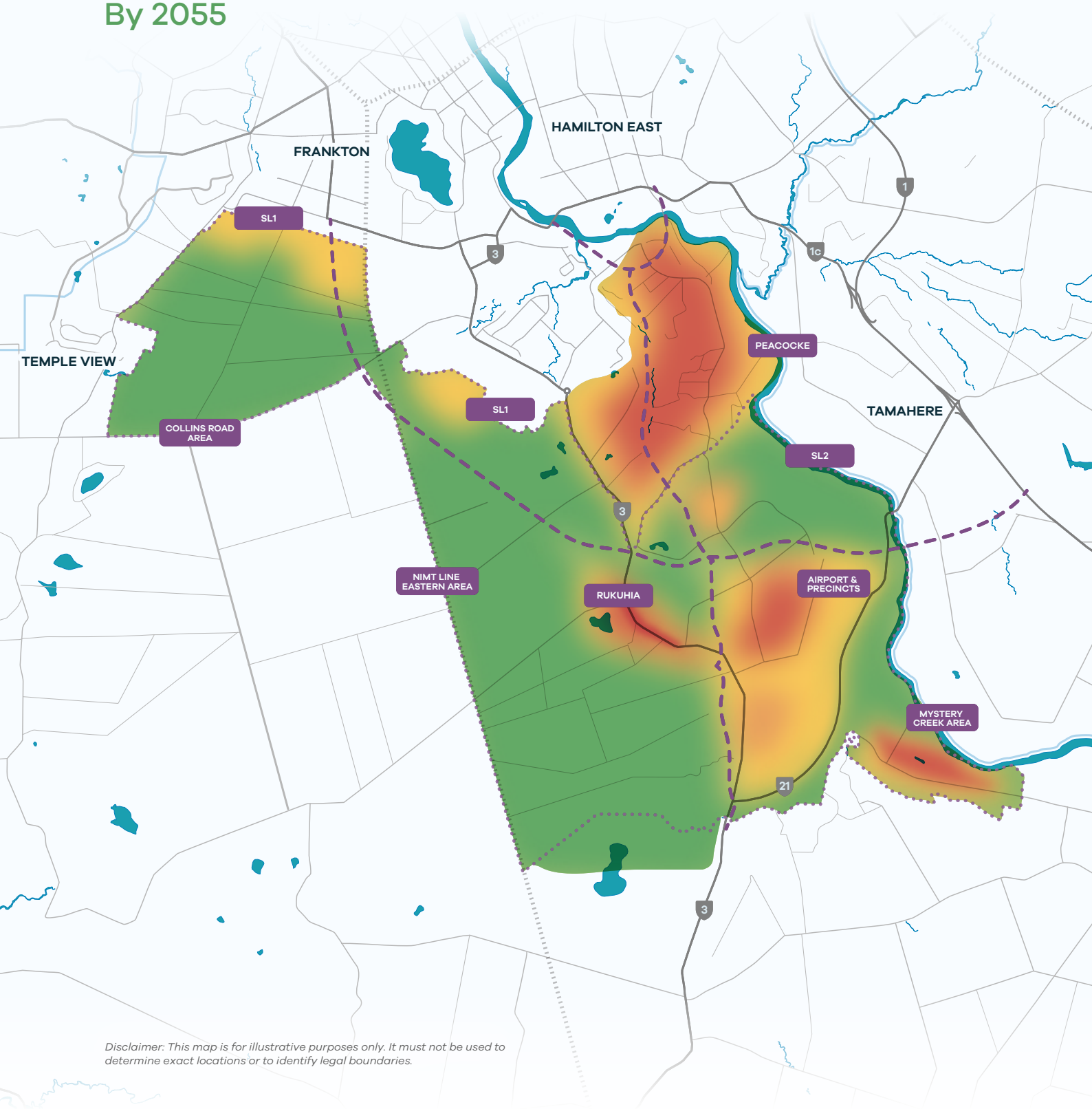
Legend

- District lines
- State Highways
- Waikato River
- Railway
- Hamilton Southern Links designation
- Study area boundary
- Lower or no development / activity*
- Higher level of development / activity*

**Level of residential, industrial, or commercial development or activity compared to the 2025 baseline.*

Scenario Five: Environmental gateway

By 2055



Disclaimer: This map is for illustrative purposes only. It must not be used to determine exact locations or to identify legal boundaries.

Legend

- District lines
- State Highways
- Waikato River
- Railway
- Hamilton Southern Links designation
- Study area boundary
- Lower or no development / activity*
- Higher level of development / activity*

**Level of residential, industrial, or commercial development or activity compared to the 2025 baseline.*

What does the "By 2055" scenario imply in terms of our outcome statements?

Employment and Job Opportunities

The study area has become a green industrial super-node, with the Airport, Ruakura, and Mystery Creek collaborating around a shared identity of sustainability, innovation, and agri-tech. Employment is anchored by high-value, low-impact industries — clean-tech manufacturing, sustainable food production, circular economy businesses, and eco-tourism.

The University of Waikato and mana whenua enterprises are central partners, providing research, training, and pathways into skilled jobs. Seasonal employment is catered for through quality accommodation and used as a stepping stone to more permanent roles in regenerative horticulture and eco-tourism.

A Great Place to Live

Neighbourhoods in Peacocke, Rukuhia, and Ōhaupō are compact and walkable. Medium-density housing is integrated with parks, wetlands, and cycleways, ensuring every community has green space on its doorstep. Residents enjoy access to clean water, safe recreation, and vibrant cultural hubs.

Development has been deliberately contained to protect elite and prime soils and surrounding rural landscapes, giving people a strong sense of living "in the green heart" of Waikato. Quality of life is high, with housing that balances sustainability and cultural identity.

Easy to Get Around

The transport network prioritises low-carbon movement. A high-patronage Bus Rapid Transit system links the Airport directly to Cambridge, Te Awamutu, and Hamilton. Freight rail servicing the Airport is under serious development, reducing dependence on trucks.

Extensive cycleways and walking corridors are aligned with gullies and riparian buffers, forming safe and scenic routes for daily travel and recreation.

Supporting Iwi Aspirations

Mana whenua are central to decision-making in this scenario. Papakaainga and iwi-led housing developments are integrated into growth areas, with design reflecting te ao Maaori values.

Co-governance arrangements ensure iwi leadership in managing ecological restoration, cultural heritage sites, and mahinga kai. Maaori design principles are evident in the built form, stormwater systems, and public spaces. Co-governance and partnerships with the private sector also ensure high employment levels amongst Waikato iwi across all skill levels.

The Waikato River is celebrated not only as a natural and cultural taonga but also as the organising principle for planning, ensuring iwi aspirations for the awa are fully embedded in the district's identity and economy.

Caring for the Environment and the Waikato River

This scenario makes the health of the Waikato River the first priority. Diffuse discharges of contaminants have reduced significantly thanks to farm environmental plans, strict allocation regimes, and a halt to land-use intensification. Blue-green networks are fully implemented, linking wetlands, peat lakes, gullies, and the awa. Water quality consistently meets swimmable standards, with biodiversity thriving — from long-tailed bats to native fish and birds.

Urban development is designed as an extension of ecological systems, not a replacement of them. The awa and its tributaries are now visibly healthier, with cultural and recreational use increasing year by year.

Level of Strategic Infrastructure Alignment

The scenario aligns strongly with Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato, Future Proof's blue-green networks, and climate change adaptation strategies.

While it diverges from the competitive land markets lens of Going for Housing Growth, it demonstrates how spatial planning can enable growth without compromising natural capital. Its focus on sequencing, environmental thresholds, and iwi partnership provides a model of strategic alignment that privileges long-term environmental outcomes over short-term growth.

Feasibility and Constructability

Growth has been restricted but is still feasible at a subregional scale, concentrated in areas where infrastructure could be provided without degrading sensitive environments.

Compact densities make efficient use of land and servicing.

The Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant functions as a cutting-edge facility, with modular expansion tied to demand. Constructability challenges (peat soils, flooding, water allocation limits) have been mitigated by staging development and embedding green infrastructure in urban form. Costs are possibly higher than in other scenarios, but the risks of environmental and infrastructure failure are lower.