



Future Proof
Te Tau Tītoki

HAMILTON-TO-TAURANGA SPATIAL STUDY

FINAL STUDY REPORT

April 2026



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1. Purpose and Background

Purpose

Future Proof, in collaboration with [SmartGrowth](#), has undertaken a high-level study that identifies and assesses the growth opportunities within the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor. The Study gives us a clear understanding of the growth area's unique needs and potential and will ensure that future economic growth and the necessary transport, water and utilities (power and telecommunication) infrastructure decisions are coordinated and aligned.

Future Proof and SmartGrowth Background

Future Proof is a collaborative partnership established in 2007, comprising iwi, local government, and central government agencies. This partnership was formed to ensure that growth in the Waikato sub-region is managed to deliver the best possible outcomes for our communities.

The Future Proof partnership has developed a comprehensive 30-year growth management and implementation strategy. The Future Proof Strategy outlines how the Hamilton, Waipā, Waikato, and Matamata-Piako sub-region will grow and evolve over the next three decades. It ensures that the partnership works collaboratively across geographic boundaries, fostering an economically successful, socially responsible, and environmentally progressive thriving Waikato sub-region.

The Strategy was updated in 2024 to ensure it incorporates new regulatory and policy requirements including the National Policy Statement on Urban Development. The strategy is essential to managing growth in a staged and co-ordinated way while addressing complex planning issues. The Strategy incorporates seven transformational moves for change:

1. Iwi aspirations
2. Waikato River at the heart
3. A comprehensive and fundamental evolution of our transport system
4. A vibrant metro core and lively metropolitan centres
5. A strong and productive economic corridor
6. Thriving communities and neighbourhoods
7. Water wise and water sensitive communities.

SmartGrowth was established in 2000 and is a formal partnership between Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council, tāngata whenua, central government and other key organisations.

The SmartGrowth Strategy provides a 50-year direction for housing, employment, and people's wellbeing in the face of rapid and sustained long term growth, while safeguarding what people value most about the sub-region. The Strategy was updated in 2024 and now includes a future development strategy under the National Policy Statement on Urban Development.

The Strategy contains six Transformational Shifts that will lead to the greatest improvement in community wellbeing outcomes, while achieving Strategy Objectives:

1. Homes for Everyone

2. Marae as Centres and Opportunities for Whenua Māori
3. Emissions Reduction through Connected Centres
4. Strong economic corridors linking the East and West to the City and the Port
5. Restore and enhance eco-systems for future generations
6. Radical change to the delivery, funding and financing model for growth

Study Origins

The Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions have a joined-up approach to the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor given the significance of this connection. There are shared objectives and priorities, and a joint investment programme has been prepared. The joint investment programme is contained in both the Future Proof and SmartGrowth Strategies. The objective is to fuel sustainable economic growth for New Zealand by highlighting the national importance of this strategic corridor which connects export industries through the Ports of Tauranga and Auckland, and inland ports.

Future Proof recognised the need for further work on the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor. Action 5.2 from the September 2024 Future Proof Implementation Plan is to conduct a high-level study to help understand the risks and opportunities within the Hamilton to Tauranga corridor, with a particular focus on the Matamata-Piako District. The exact wording from the Implementation Plan is:

“5.2 Prepare an economic and connectivity spatial concept for the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor:

This action is in response to ongoing interest in this area and recognises the connection between the Future Proof sub-region and the western Bay of Plenty sub-region. The approach will be to create a concept plan that provides sufficient detail on the function of this and how it connects to other parts of the region to clarify key infrastructure and planning requirements to enable development where appropriate. It will include Hautapu-Matamata-Waharoa-Hinuera, and surrounds.”

While not stated in the Implementation Plan itself, the subsequent project plan documented key drivers for the study as follows:

- Issues raised in the most recent FDS review, where it was identified that more information was required on the risks and opportunities for the Matamata-Piako District to inform the next Housing Business Assessment (HBA).
- Industrial growth (sub regional in nature)
- Change expected as result of corridor’s proximity to both Hamilton and Tauranga and expected decrease in travel times arising from transport improvements.
- Understanding the potential demand for future renewable energy in this area, considering proposed fast track solar farm at Hinuera and windfarms on Kaimai Ranges, solar farms in Te Aroha, Hauraki wind farm
- Need to understand social / community impacts, e.g. tolling conversation (Cambridge to Piarere) – included in RONS project and underway. Implications around Lake Karapiro and reflected in Ahu Ake.

- Recent announcements on Regional Deals, which include a focus on the Ruakura East area at the western end of this corridor.

Project Aims

A project plan was developed in late 2024 and approved by the Strategic and Spatial Project Control Group (PCG) in January 2025. It includes the following objective and supporting text:

“To ensure that future economic growth is well-coordinated, and that the necessary transport infrastructure decisions are made with a clear understanding of a potential growth area's unique needs and potential.”

The project's aim is to develop a *high-level* spatial analysis study of growth opportunities within the Future Proof subregion's part of the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor. This study will focus on the interplay between economic development, land use (considering natural, environmental and cultural factors), and enhancements in transport safety, connectivity, and travel times.

The aim is to inform key strategic documents such as the next Housing Business Assessment (HBA), Future Development Strategy (FDS), Waikato Regional Policy Statement (RPS), Matamata-Piako District Plan and Regional Land Transport Plan.”

The Project Plan goes on to state that the concept study is expected to:

- Demonstrate how, in this corridor, the Future Proof partners will give effect to the National led government’s focus on lifting economic productivity and freight efficiency objectives reflected in the GPS for Transport, and what Future Proof’s intended land use response is to the creation of new Roads of National Significance.
- Integrate land-use planning along the corridor, considering the SmartGrowth Future Development Strategy and government investments in Tauriko and Cambridge-to-Piarere expressways, and the Hamilton to Tauranga Investment Programme in the Future Proof Strategy (pp 30-31).
- Provide a 30-year vision for potential development without delving into the specifics of a masterplan or Structure Plan.

In doing so, the completed study is expected to assist Future Proof:

- To determine whether a strategic response is necessary to land use change pressures arising from significant transport infrastructure investments, and if so, to determine what that response should be.
- To align partner decision-making and investments in this area to maximise the expected benefits from the government’s investments in the Cambridge to Piarere and Tauriko segments of the roading network, and any future investment in the rail network.
- To identify key environmental issues or other constraints that need to be addressed in managing growth and development in these areas.
- To improve integration between Future Proof partner plans and those of South Waikato District Council, who will be engaged with a stakeholder in the study.

Key Study Questions

To focus the study on the intended objective and aims above, the Project Plan includes the following critical questions for the study to answer in relation to the corridor:

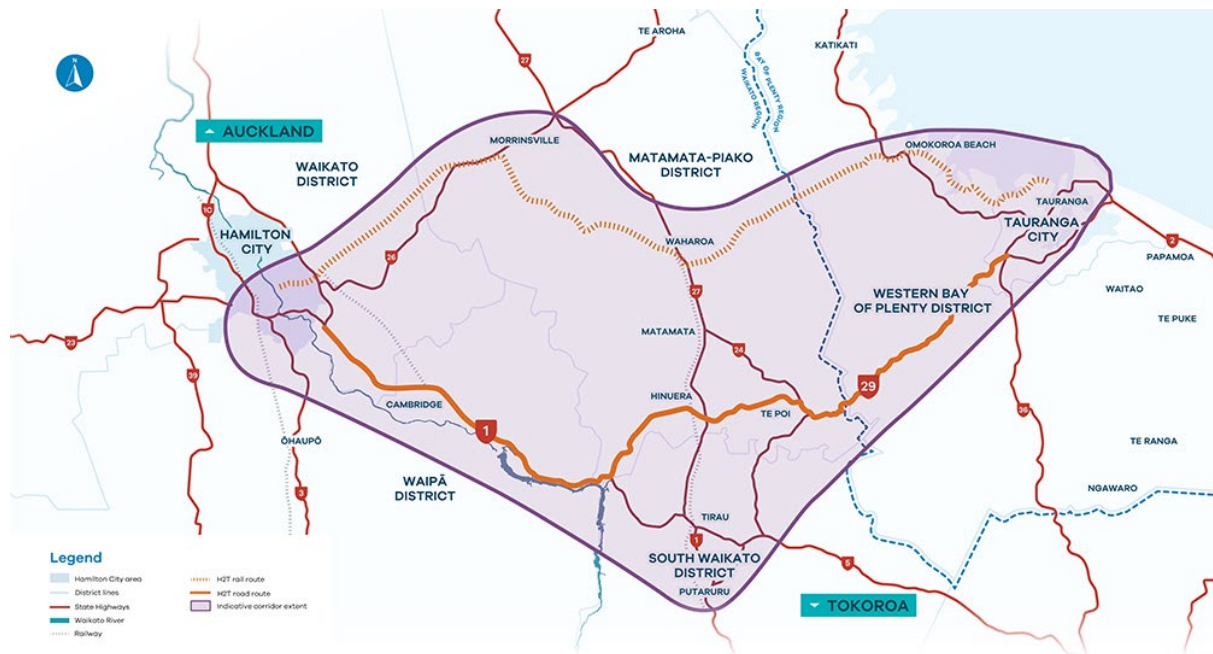
1. **Understanding of Economic Response:** What steps can Future Proof take to better understand the potential economic response to transport investments along, or in proximity to this corridor, including likely demand for development, types of jobs, and the necessary infrastructure to support this economic activity, to ensure timely infrastructure investment and support future growth?
2. **Economic Opportunities from Integrating Land Use with Rail:** What are the potential economic benefits of integrating land use with rail along this corridor to guide effective planning for well-connected and accessible urban and regional areas?
3. **Implications of Induced Demand, Environmental Risks and Infrastructure Costs:** What are the potential consequences for the Future Proof region arising from increased demand for industrial land and housing arising as a consequence of reduced travel times associated with the government investments in the Cambridge to Piarere and Tauriko corridors? How might changes in demand affect required infrastructure costs? Are there particular social, cultural, and environmental impacts arising from this increased demand that need to be managed?
4. **Economic Function of Matamata-Piako and South Waikato areas in the context of the Upper North Island (UNI):** What is the role of the Matamata-Piako District and South Waikato District in the growth and development of the UNI, and what information gaps need to be filled to inform future strategies?
5. **Value Capture and Strategic Infrastructure Staging:** What are the opportunities to use value capture for funding growth infrastructure, and plan the staging and sequencing of infrastructure to improve delivery efficiency and effectiveness?
6. **Infrastructure Risks to Housing, Rural and Township Development:** What additional infrastructure is likely to be required to support more housing and papakāinga along the Hamilton to Tauranga corridor, and what are the challenges or risks around the provisions of this infrastructure?
7. **Labour Force Accessibility to Economic Opportunities:** Where will workers live, and will the housing and transport costs be affordable?
8. **Understanding of Environmental and Cultural Protection Requirements and Opportunities:**
How can we address significant environmental constraints and opportunities, such as highly productive land, peat soils, biodiversity habitats, species, flooding, and liquefaction risks, to realise the expected economic benefits from growth in this area

while protecting and potentially enhancing the natural environment?
What are the "no-go" or "go-carefully" areas from environmental, hazard, and cultural protection perspectives? What are the potential opportunities for Blue-Green Corridors, as has been done in the Hamilton-Waikato Metro Spatial Plan?

The key study questions above were endorsed by the Future Proof Implementation Committee (FPIC) at its December 2024 meeting.

Geographic Scope

The area considered by this study is shown in the map below, focusing on the area around the East Coast Main Trunk rail line and the SH1 / SH29 corridor:



The study area is defined to include the area around and between State Highways 1 and 29 and the East Coast Main Trunk (ECMT) rail line, and so includes parts of the Future Proof and Smart Growth territorial authorities, and the northern part of neighbouring South Waikato District (around Tīrau and Putāruru, both of which are south of the SH29 corridor, but relevant for this study because of their proximity to it).

The study area is anchored by the large metropolitan urban areas of Hamilton and Tauranga and their peripheral greenfields growth areas at each end, with towns and smaller settlements located between, including Cambridge, Morrinsville, Matamata, Waharoa, Tīrau, and Putāruru.

2. Resourcing and Structure

This study and the North Waipā / South Hamilton spatial study have been funded from Future Proof’s spatial planning budget across the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years. After an initial allocation to both studies for a part-time Project Director (seconded from Waikato District Council) and consultant work towards draft project plans, an allocation from the remaining budget was approved by PCG for this study. In November 2025, the Programme Management Group (PMG) approved an additional allocation to both studies to continue the Project Director role through the FPIC approval stages in early 2026.

The allocated funding has primarily gone towards a series of economic and planning analysis reports by a team from Formative Ltd and Enspire Ltd – including a gap analysis report, an options report, and a final summary study report. Funding has also gone towards communications and graphics support for stakeholder engagement strategies and materials. In addition to Future Proof’s funding, Smart Growth has provided funding to expand the economic analysis of the Smart Growth area, to commission a market research report, and to support the development of communications materials.

Staff from Future Proof and Smart Growth partners have also provided many hours of in-kind support – reviewing draft materials, attending workshops, providing inputs to the stocktake / gap analysis exercise, communicating with stakeholders, etc.

The project has also been supported and guided by the different levels of the Future Proof working and governance structure (Policy and Planning Working Group, Project Control Group, Programme Management Group, Chief Executives Advisory Group, and Future Proof Implementation Committee), as well as Smart Growth’s governance structure including the Strategic Leadership Group.

3. Vision and Key Outcome Statements

A draft vision and supporting outcome statements were produced in June 2025, drawing on the Future Proof Strategy's Key Transformational Moves but with a focus on the Key Study Questions.

Following Stage 1 engagement, the vision and outcome statements were revised and endorsed by FPIC. The revised vision is:

“The Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor will be a vibrant, productive economic hub, anchored by metro centres at either end and well-connected to the rest of the Upper North Island, home to thriving and interconnected communities and sustainable infrastructure, and shaped in partnership with iwi and key community groups. Growth will be focused in and around existing settlements to protect the natural environment and make efficient use of existing infrastructure.”

The vision and supporting outcome statements are available at Appendix 1 and online at <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-1>

The vision and supporting outcome statements were considered in the assessment of scenarios and options.

In addition, the potential metrics alongside the outcome statements can be used for any monitoring of the implementation of this study and its impact.

4. Stocktake and Gap Analysis

From February through May 2025, a stocktake of relevant strategic documents and other information that could inform the study was conducted. The starting point was a brainstorm by the project team to generate a list of relevant material. This was followed by a request for Future Proof partner staff in the project team to obtain, share and summarise these key documents in relation to the study questions.

When the consultant team of Formative / Enspire was appointed, they completed the summarisation of these stocktake documents and produced a stocktake / gap analysis report, available at Appendix 2 and online at <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-2>

A number of information gaps were identified in the report, and via stakeholder feedback (see Section 7 below), many of which have subsequently been filled by the economic and planning analysis that underpinned the Scenarios / Options report.

5. Scenario / Options Report

A draft Scenario / Options report was drafted by the consultant team of Formative Ltd (an Auckland-based economics consultancy), supported by Enspire Ltd (a Tauranga-based planning consultancy), in July 2025. The draft report was revised in several stages, initially in response to feedback from Future Proof's project team, Policy and Planning Working Group, and Strategic and Spatial Project Control Group. In September, Smart Growth staff and partners also provided feedback, following a presentation on the study to a joint Future Proof / Smart Growth governance forum. With Smart Growth funding support, the material on Tauranga and the Smart Growth Western Corridor was expanded to better reflect the whole H2T corridor. Summary materials were prepared to release alongside the full report for Stage 2 stakeholder engagement in October.

The full Scenario / Options Report is available at Appendix 3 and online at <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-3>

The summary material is available at Appendix 4 and online at <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-4>

The Scenarios / Options report presents the results of a scenario-based spatial analysis of potential growth futures within the Corridor, considering the potential changes in growth that might arise due to changes in the transport network. The report addresses the key study questions, focusing on the interplay between economic development, land use (considering environmental, cultural and infrastructure factors), and enhancements in transport safety, connectivity, and travel times.

Scope and Methodology

The Scenarios / Options report used scenarios to stimulate discussion on a range of possible futures. None of the scenarios are firm predictions, but each is an illustrative example of a potential future with regard to transport-induced growth and its implications. The goal has been to obtain views on what Future Proof and Smart Growth partners and stakeholders see as the pros and cons, opportunities and risks of each scenario and/or its individual components. A preferred scenario (or a most likely scenario, which could be different) could then be identified.

Identifying a preferred or most likely scenario provides no guarantees that it will come to pass, as there is a plethora of significant factors such as market forces that are outside the control of the Future Proof / Smart Growth partnerships and their stakeholders.

Nevertheless, the identification of a preferred or most likely scenario allows for further exploration of available options that can ideally:

- a) increase the likelihood of a preferred scenario or its most desirable elements occurring;
- b) prepare Future Proof partners and stakeholders to act on the opportunities and mitigate any risks associated with the most likely scenario;
- c) provide resilience across multiple scenarios (for example, identifying some things it makes sense to do no matter what scenarios come to pass); and

- d) identify any elements of a contingency plan that could mitigate the risks arising from the non-preferred scenarios occurring anyway (e.g., how could Future Proof partners respond to significant unanticipated development pressure in an area with severe environmental, cultural or infrastructural constraints?).

Scenario Description

The draft Scenarios / Options Report analysed the following four scenarios in terms of potential demand pressure and planning options:

- **Scenario One: Baseline**
- **Scenario Two: Metro Gravity:** includes induced growth arising from transport improvements in the Corridor, with weighting towards the metropolitan centres of Hamilton and Tauranga at either end of the Corridor
- **Scenario Three: Central Gravity:** also includes induced growth arising from transport improvements, but increases the weighting towards communities in the central part of the Corridor between Hamilton and Tauranga
- **Scenario Four: New Node:** adds a significant amount of growth at an undefined central location outside existing urban areas (loosely based on the Sleepyhead / Ohinewai concept north of Huntly)

These scenarios were endorsed by FPIC in September 2025 as the focus for Stage 2 stakeholder engagement.

Key Findings

Some of the key findings in the Scenarios / Options report were as follows:

Potential Demand Under Each Scenario

- Induced growth arising from planned transport improvements is expected to be relatively small in absolute terms, but for smaller communities in the central part of the Corridor the percentage increase and proportional impact could be greater. This is particularly the case under the Central Gravity and New Node scenarios.

Planning Considerations including No-Go and Go-Carefully Areas

- Implications for Matamata, and to a lesser degree Tirau and Putāruru, could be significant in terms of land use pressure, with significant potential increases in business and residential demand, alongside infrastructure constraints such as three waters servicing and environmental constraints such as highly productive land.

Options

- Options for responding to any future induced demand, in excess of official projections, include seeking to accommodate the growth through addressing the constraints (e.g. infrastructure upgrades or environmental mitigation), or attempting to steer the growth to relatively unconstrained areas within the Corridor.
- Induced demand is not projected to require the creation of new urban areas within the Corridor, and growing existing towns would be more consistent with the Future Proof Strategy and Councils' planning policies.

The Scenarios / Options report was the subject of Stage 2 stakeholder engagement; a summary of the approach and the feedback received is provided in Section 7 below.

6. Market Research

With funding from Smart Growth, Colliers was commissioned to undertake market research on the feasibility, market appetite and any barriers to development in relation to the four scenarios in the Scenarios / Options report. This work was based on analysis of development and population trends, and interviews with several market participants.

Colliers concluded that the Metro Gravity scenario is most likely, particularly for residential development, but that the Central Gravity scenario is also plausible, especially over time as developers seek more affordable land in the corridor's centre. They highlighted some stakeholders' interest in the central part of the corridor for industrial and logistics uses, possibly at an existing town like Matamata or Tirau, or a new or expanded node such as at Hinuera, provided there is sufficient infrastructure and connectivity.

The Colliers report ("Review of Hamilton to Tauranga Spatial Study Options, 8 Dec 2025") is available at Appendix 5 and online at <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-5>

7. Stakeholder Engagement

A Communications and Engagement Plan for the study, including an initial Key Stakeholder List, was developed with the project team and approved by the Spatial and Strategy PCG in April 2025. It is attached as Appendix 6 <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-6>

Stage 1 Engagement

The first engagement phase (Stage 1) focused on the draft Vision and Outcome Statements, and the Stocktake / Gap Analysis report. Of the initial stakeholder list, based on prioritisation and availability of contact information, approximately 30 stakeholders were sent e-mails inviting them to review this material and provide feedback. A survey was open for two weeks from 16 June through 30 June, and 1:1 meetings were held with interested stakeholders (B&A consultants, and PowerCo).

A total of four survey responses were received (attached as Appendix 7 <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-7>).

They indicated a general level of comfort with the work to date, but highlighted some areas to be strengthened in subsequent analysis. Specifically, the feedback included suggestions to consider:

- The importance of private infrastructure providers (e.g. telecommunications)
- Wildlife, wetlands and other natural features beyond river corridors and some Significant Natural Areas
- Wider inter-regional connections beyond the Corridor.

This feedback was considered and addressed where possible in the Scenarios / Options report.

Stage 2 Engagement

The second engagement phase (Stage 2) focused on the Scenarios / Options report discussed above, using the same two-pronged approach as Stage 1 engagement:

- Targeted stakeholders identified through the project work to date were approached directly for their feedback, to be provided through an online survey (open for one month from 28 October through 28 November) or through 1:1 meetings by request.
- The wider community had an opportunity to provide feedback via the online survey on the Future Proof website. The SmartGrowth website also contained information on the Study and linked to the Future Proof online survey.

Feedback was received from 15 organisations: 10 through the online survey form and 5 through stand-alone submissions. All the feedback is attached as Appendix 8 <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-8>

Most feedback received supported the conclusions of the Scenarios / Options report, including the relevance and usefulness of the scenarios explored, the widespread nature of constraints along the Corridor, and the ability to potentially overcome many of those constraints. There was variation as to which scenario was most likely or most desirable, and which policy options were advisable, as summarised below:

Survey Feedback

<u>Scenarios:</u>	<u>Options:</u>
<p>Metro Gravity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 “Get It, Love It” • 3 “Not So Sure” • 2 “Absolutely Not” <p>Central Gravity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 “Get It, Love It” • 4 “Not So Sure” • 2 “Absolutely Not” <p>New Node:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 “Get It, Love It”* • 2 “Not So Sure” • 1 “Absolutely Not” 	<p>Steer Growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Support • 2 Neutral <p>Address Constraints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Support • 4 Neutral • 1 Don’t Support <p>Change Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Support • 4 Neutral • 1 Don’t Support

*For the New Node, 3 of the “Get It, Love It” respondents (Kaimai Sheep, Kaimai Fresh, Calcutta Farms) are understood to be associated with Calcutta Plan Change in Matamata and have nearly identical responses.

The responses above were supplemented by open-ended comments from several respondents, which explained the pros and cons of each scenario and option, and their reasons for scoring them as they did.

Stand-alone submissions (outside the survey)

- **Property Council** supports a balanced approach that prioritises metro areas in the short term but works towards a central industrial hub in the medium- to long-term. They support steering growth and addressing constraints, but only limited, well-justified policy changes.
- **Tainui Group Holdings** suggests not undermining Ruakura with another inland port without comprehensive assessment.
- **Barker & Associates** suggests more consideration of Fast Track and RM Reform.
- **Forest and Bird** covers a range of environmental considerations across all scenarios.
- **KiwiRail** highlights the need to avoid undue constraints on the rail network.

This feedback informed the final summary report by Formative / Enspire (see Section 10 below).

8. Mana Whenua Engagement

The project team was guided in this work by Future Proof's mana whenua liaison advisor, Steven Wilson, who suggested the following approach:

- Provide briefings to established forums (Ngā Karu Atua o Te Waka, Ngā Iwi o Te Waipā, and the Matamata-Piako Mana Whenua Forum)
- Engage directly with iwi and mana whenua.
- Throughout, ensure that groups are aware and comfortable with the project team's understanding of previous mana whenua input into relevant studies and planning processes.

The rest of this section summarises how this approach was applied throughout the study.

The scope, key study questions and timelines for the two studies were presented to Ngā Karu Atua o Te Waka in February 2025, and the group suggested that engagement occur directly with relevant mana whenua, while keeping Ngā Karu Atua abreast of study progress. In March 2025, a similar presentation was delivered to a group of Waipā-based mana whenua representatives that had gathered at Hamilton City Council regarding the Southern Wastewater Treatment Plant project.

In late June, parallel to Stage 1 stakeholder engagement on the draft vision / outcome statements and gap analysis reports, e-mails were sent to approximately 35 representatives of mana whenua groups in the two study areas, advising them of the stakeholder engagement materials and an upcoming opportunity for online "Zui" in early August. A list of the mana whenua groups approached directly is attached at Appendix 9 <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-9>

Six timeslots for online Zui were offered on 4 and 6 August, covering both this study and a parallel North Waipā / South Hamilton spatial study. Material was pre-circulated summarising key mana whenua-related themes extracted from key documents such as the Future Proof Strategy, Ahu Ake (Waipā Community Spatial Plan) and various Iwi Management / Environmental Plans. A shortened version this material was presented at the Zui, and discussion occurred on what opportunities and risks each study should consider with respect to mana whenua aspirations.

Attendees on 4 and 6 August included the Chair of Ngā Karu Atua o Te Waka, representatives from Ngāti Wairere and Ngāti Koroki Kahukura, and Matamata-Piako District Council's iwi liaison advisor. Subsequent Zui took place in late August with representatives from Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Haua and Ngāti Hinerangi.

Stage 2 Zui on Scenarios / Options occurred in the week of 17 – 21 November 2025, using the same approach as Stage 1. Four mana whenua representatives attended these (from Ngā Karu Atua o Te Waka, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Paretokawa, and Waikato-Tainui) and provided feedback.

A summary of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Zui is attached at Appendix 10.

<https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-10>

SmartGrowth undertook engagement via the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum. The Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor Spatial Study was discussed at the 7 October and 10 December 2025 hui. The following is a high-level summary of the feedback provided:

- The importance of rail, particularly the Kaimai Tunnel
- The increase in freight and the role of inland ports
- It was highlighted that a lot of Māori Land exists along SH29 to Te Poi.
- It was noted that the project does not include Waihi and Rotorua.

9. Scenario and Option Assessment

On 4 December a three-hour online workshop was held with 22 attendees from the Future Proof and SmartGrowth project teams as well as some members of Future Proof's Policy and Planning Working Group (PPWG). Notes from this workshop are attached at Appendix 11 – <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-11>

Attendees reached a consensus that the most likely scenario, in the short-term at least, is the Metro Gravity scenario, but that in the medium- and long-term the pattern might start shifting towards the Central Gravity scenario.

Options and potential recommendations were discussed at length, informed by Formative / Enspire's technical assessment, Colliers' market research, and stakeholder and mana whenua feedback. This discussion has informed the final study report by Formative / Enspire (Appendix 12) and the recommendations in this report (Section 10 below).

10. Final Study Findings and Recommendations

Final summary report

Based on the market research summarised in Section 6, the stakeholder and mana whenua feedback summarised in Sections 7 and 8, and the project team workshop summarised in Section 9, the consultant team produced a final summary report, available at Appendix 12 and <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-12>

Recommendations: Process and Overview

A draft set of recommendations was circulated by Jim Ebenhoh, Project Director, on 10 December for comments by the project team and the Policy and Planning Working Group by 17 December. Feedback was provided by several Future Proof partners (Waipā DC, Hamilton CC, NZTA Waka Kotahi and Ministry of Education) and SmartGrowth (including Tauranga CC). This feedback was incorporated into the 19 January version of this report for the Project Control Group. The Formative / Enspire report has nearly identical recommendations to the 19 January PCG version, due to close collaboration between the consultant team and the project team.

Feedback from the 22 January PCG meeting was incorporated into the revised recommendations for the Programme Management Group (PMG). The recommendations were unchanged by the PMG, but at the 5 February meeting of the Chief Executives Advisory Group (CEAG) additional recommendations were suggested in relation to water security and the use of this study by NZTA Waka Kotahi.

The recommendations are separated into governance-level vs operational-level, and can eventually indicate potential lead and support organisations. While focused on the H2T Corridor, some of the recommendations would make sense to implement within a wider all-of-subregion(s) context, e.g. across the Future Proof and/or Smart Growth areas.

The themes of the recommendations include:

- Focus on urban consolidation and agglomeration (existing centres and towns)
- Input into subsequent planning processes
- Monitoring and revision
- Infrastructure funding
- Transport issues
- Environmental issues

In arriving at the project recommendations below, the project team considered the following:

- Availability of relevant policy / planning / funding levers
- Political feasibility
- Potential support from stakeholders and community
- Affordability and efficiency

Key Messages

The specific formal recommendations approved below are numerous, lengthy and complex – reflecting the breadth and complexity of the multi-faceted issues and opportunities in the H2T Corridor. For effective impact, they have been supplemented with a clear and compelling “story” that can be incorporated in growth-related discussions at the highest levels, including between local government elected members and central government ministers.

The following key messages have been identified in relation to the context, findings and recommendations of this study:

- The Hamilton-to-Tauranga Corridor, which is an important part of the Golden Triangle and the Upper North’s Island’s function as an economic engine for Aotearoa, is already experiencing and predicted to continue to experience high rates of growth. A few facts illustrate this:
 - The Corridor’s population increased from just over 250,000 people in 1996 to more than 450,000 in 2024, and employment in the study area nearly doubled from 139,650 in 2000 to over 258,000 in 2024.
 - There are over 300 planned developments within the territorial authorities located in the corridor, and the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions’ combined population is expected to increase by 280,500 by 2048.
- The significant benefits arising from Roads of National Significance (RoNS) in the Corridor will result in additional growth beyond what has already been predicted. Under the most likely scenarios, approximately 900-1000 additional dwellings are expected to arise from the transport improvements in next 30 years. An extra 26ha of industrial land and 11ha of commercial land are expected. This economic activity arising from this extra development could generate an additional \$200m of GDP in the Waikato region and \$130m of GDP in the Bay of Plenty region.
- While the RoNS will be useful in supporting existing and planned growth, the scale of the additional growth expected to arise specifically from these transport improvements is not considerably greater overall than the high growth scenarios the Future Proof and SmartGrowth partnerships are already planning for. This is a good-news story; it means the Corridor is likely to remain capable of accommodating the extra economic and/or residential development that may be required, provided the necessary infrastructure and associated funding is available and various other constraints can be overcome.
- Though the overall scale of growth across the Corridor has largely been planned for, the distribution of future growth could shift somewhat. Additional growth is expected to continue to occur mostly at either end of the corridor, but there is still significant potential growth relative to current size in the central towns that we should also plan for.

- Market research and stakeholder feedback suggests that most people support growth that builds on existing settlements, rather than developing new urban centres, largely due to the infrastructure costs of starting afresh.
- This aligns well with the Future Proof Strategy and SmartGrowth Strategy; it suggests that any review of those strategies or subsequent spatial plans should encourage growth to locate in or as well-planned extensions to existing towns. The results of the study are good news for the Future Proof and SmartGrowth partnerships; the additional growth created by transport investments is expected to be of a manageable scale, maintaining a general weighting towards the metro areas of Hamilton and Tauranga.
- While adhering to the general patterns of the Future Proof Strategy and SmartGrowth Strategy, it is important for Councils in the centre of the corridor (particularly Matamata-Piako District Council) to be prepared for a potential shift in demand towards the centre of the Corridor and guide it to the most efficient and beneficial locations.
- Ultimately this work is recommended to be a key input to Regional Spatial Plans.

11. Governance Resolutions

At its 20 February meeting, the Future Proof Implementation Committee (FPIC) approved the following suite of recommendations:

That the Future Proof Implementation Committee:

1. **Receive this report and its appendices**
2. **Endorse the Executive Summary above as a basis for communication with central government and other key stakeholders.**
3. **Adopt, in principle, the following recommendations (subject to final approval by a joint meeting of the ~~Independent~~ Chairs / Mayors / Chairs of Future Proof and SmartGrowth), as a Strategic Framework to Guide Regional Spatial Plans:**
 1. *Within the Hamilton-to-Tauranga Corridor, maintain a focus on:*
 - a. *the Future Proof and SmartGrowth strategies' existing urban consolidation approach, with most growth in the Hamilton and Tauranga metro areas.*
 - b. *enabling and delivering the planned growth areas identified in the Future Proof and SmartGrowth strategies.*
 - c. *removing constraints in the planned growth areas across the corridor, noting that if metro-area constraints cannot be resolved there is potential for a further increase in the proportion of growth occurring between the two metro areas, particularly in the medium to long term.*
 - d. *planning for the growth expected to continue to occur in the central part of the corridor (e.g. Matamata, Tirau and Putāruru) based on location relative to some markets, relative affordability and metro-area constraints.*
 - e. *incorporating and appropriately adjusting to Fast Track while maintaining a clear preference for a consolidated metro urban form within the corridor based on the best and most efficient amenity, infrastructure and transport outcomes.*
 2. *In keeping with the focus on urban consolidation:*
 - a. *Note that the projected growth (baseline growth plus transport-improvement-induced growth) does not require the creation of new settlements or nodes beyond those already planned for, nor significant expansion of small existing rural settlements.*
 - b. *Allow smaller existing rural settlements not currently planned for expansion (e.g. Hinuera, Te Poi, Waitoa and Waharoa) to remain as they are, noting that there is potential for expansion of these settlements should appropriate servicing be available at minimal cost to ratepayers.*
 - c. *Encourage growth in the right locations, by signaling that the Future Proof and SmartGrowth partnerships are not seeking to proactively deliver any additional future growth nodes beyond those in the existing Future Development Strategies, and that there are likely to be significant constraints (infrastructure servicing and funding, environmental, cultural etc.) affecting the viability of any privately-led proposals for additional future growth nodes.*

3. *Seek to deliver the 'live, learn, work, play' concept in the Corridor through integration of new development with established communities, to improve productivity by reducing potential commuting time and cost, and to manage impact on the Corridor's transport network.*
 4. *Note that Corridor investments are likely to have spillover impact beyond the study area and the associated modelling: e.g. on Tokoroa and Te Aroha. Accordingly, take opportunities to connect this work (and any future revisions) with the geographically broader work of the Upper North Island Strategic Alliance (UNISA), including around port connections and freight movement, and the Infrastructure Commission Pipeline and National Infrastructure Plan.**
 5. *Formally request NZTA Waka Kotahi to consider the findings of this study as a key input to their Hamilton-to-Tauranga Corridor strategic study, including consideration of the different growth scenarios that have been modelled.*
 6. *Given constraints on water availability throughout the corridor, and in keeping with the urban consolidation approach, focus development on areas where there are existing consented water takes and/or water available to allocate.*
4. **Note the following Technical / Operational Level recommendations, which have been approved by the Chief Executives Advisory Group, as inputs into the Regional Spatial Planning Process:**
7. *Noting that this study has anticipated the changing regulatory environment and has been designed to be flexible and adaptable, reflect its findings in the review and/or preparation of the following strategic planning documents, taking into account the recommendations above:*
 1. *Future Proof and SmartGrowth Housing and Business Capacity Assessments (HBCAs)*
 2. *Regional Spatial Plans for the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty*
 3. *Local / district growth strategies (e.g. those of Waipā District, Matamata-Piako District and South Waikato District)*
 4. *Cambridge Connections project (Waipā DC)*
 5. *Regional Land Transport Plans (RLTPs) for the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty*
 6. *NZTA Waka Kotahi's strategic study of the H2T Corridor*
 7. *Water services plans of the new water entities in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions*
 8. *Future water security planning*
 8. *Record and monitor projects and trends that are relevant to planning to accommodate growth:*
 - a. *Prepare and maintain a database of planned critical infrastructure projects across the Future Proof and SmartGrowth subregions' section of the H2T Corridor, integrating with the NZ Infrastructure Commission / Te Waihanga's national infrastructure*

*pipeline and similar work of UNISA in the Upper North Island, to inform ongoing monitoring of the serviceability of planned and potential development in relation to expected demand.**

- b. Prepare maps to show 'green light areas' where there is existing infrastructure capacity to accommodate growth, and 'yellow light areas' where such capacity is planned and funded for the future, and update these as new projects are funded and completed.**
- c. Monitor development trends, including the impact of Fast Track approvals as they occur, to compare development patterns with the Metro Gravity and Central Gravity scenarios in the attached Formative / Enspire report.**

9. Monitor and if necessary, revise growth modelling, and any resulting implications for the planning response:

- a. As an input to HBCAs, obtaining revised projected demand figures in this study once updated baseline projections are available across the two sub-regions.**
- b. Based on the timing and likelihood of planned transport improvements (e.g. C2P or SH29 RoNS), as well as future decisions regarding tolling or time-of-use charging.**
- c. In response to the impact of RMA replacement legislation (once enacted) on the policy and process settings and constraints, and resulting impact on land demand and supply, in the Corridor.**

10. In recognition of increasing transport demand in the Corridor, and the potential for safety, affordability, sustainability and resilience issues, support a focused investigation on the potential for rail transport in NZTA Waka Kotahi's current strategic corridor study, and ongoing coordination of rail investigations and investments by KiwiRail, NZTA / Waka Kotahi, Waikato Regional Council and Bay of Plenty Regional Council.

11. Recommend to NZTA Waka Kotahi that consideration is given in their strategic transport study to addressing the safety issues affecting marae and papakāinga (existing and proposed) highlighted by mana whenua in relation to intersections along SH29 and other state highways in the corridor.

12. Commission an update of the H2T spatial study report when there has been a significant shift in demand forecasts, development trends or other matters in relation to the asterisked recommendations, to assist with the development of Regional Spatial Plans.

5. Note the following Technical / Operational Level recommendations, which have been approved by the Chief Executives Advisory Group, as components of an Implementation / Coordination Plan:

13. Continue to investigate and implement solutions (e.g. policy and funding incentives) to enable planned development in metro areas and mid-sized towns where infrastructure

capacity or can be created with cost-effective investment.

14. *In the context of infrastructure funding challenges, including proposed rates capping, understand and take appropriate opportunities to implement available funding and financing levers to ensure infrastructure is provided in line with clearly identified strategic priorities.*
15. *Promote an H2T environmental and ecological corridor by encouraging and identifying opportunities for the maintenance and enhancement of habitat and blue-green corridors (including and connecting the Kaimai Ranges, Waikato River catchment, Waihou / Waitoa / Piako River catchments, Maungatautari, Te Miro, Maungakawa, Te Tapui, Volcanoes and Tauranga Harbour).*
16. *Subject to any work done through future Regional Spatial Plans, conduct more detailed, site-specific mapping of environmental and cultural constraints (including “No-Go” and “Go-Carefully” areas) at the appropriate time for inclusion in zoning, structure plans and site development plans.*

*NOTE: asterisked recommendations relate to potential future revision(s) of this study (timing TBC as per Recommendation 12).

At its 19 March 2026 meeting, the SmartGrowth Leadership approved the following recommendations, which themselves (via Appendix 1 to the SmartGrowth report) referred to the recommendations above:

That the SmartGrowth Leadership Group:

1. Receives the report “Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor Spatial Study”.
2. Approves in principle the study findings and recommendations set out in Appendix 1, as a standalone strategic framework to guide the development of Regional Spatial Plans, subject to final approval by a joint meeting of the Chairs / Mayors / Chairs of SmartGrowth and Future Proof.
3. Endorses the information contained in the study as a basis for communication with central government and other key stakeholders on land use and infrastructure in the Hamilton to Tauranga corridor.

As of the date of the writing of this report (April 2026), a joint meeting of the Future Proof / SmartGrowth Mayors and Chairs was planned for May or June, to jointly confirm the recommendations approved separately by Future Proof and SmartGrowth as per above, and to discuss next steps and implementation pathways.

12. Appendices

1. Vision/Outcome Statements - <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-1>
2. Stocktake/Gap Analysis Report - <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-2>
3. Scenario/Options Report (Formative/Enspire) <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-3>
4. Summary Materials: Scenario/Options Report <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-4>
5. Market Research Report (Colliers) <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-5>
6. Communications and Engagement Plan, including Key Stakeholder List
<https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-6>
7. Stage 1 Feedback <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-7>
8. Stage 2 Feedback <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-8>
9. Mana Whenua Contact List <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-9>
10. Mana Whenua Zui Notes <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-10>
11. 4 December Project Team Workshop Notes <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-11>
12. Final Summary Report (Formative / Enspire) <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/spatial-study-appx-1-12>

13. Acknowledgements

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- The core project teams and working groups (including Future Proof’s Policy and Planning Working Group) from the Future Proof and SmartGrowth partners (Hamilton City Council, Waipā District Council, Waikato District Council, Matamata-Piako District Council, Waikato Regional Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council), South Waikato District Council, and central Government agencies of Kāinga Ora, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, New Zealand Transport Authority / Waka Kotahi, Ministry of Education.
- Future Proof’s Ngā Karu Atua o Te Waka, Project Control Group, Programme Management Group, Chief Executives Advisory Group, and Future Proof Implementation Committee
- Steven Wilson – Future Proof’s Mana Whenua engagement advisor
- Natalie Haysom – Future Proof’s communications advisor
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