

SmartGrowth
Building our futures together

Update April 2026

Maintaining momentum through transition

SmartGrowth continues to build momentum as the partnership transitions from strategy development into coordinated delivery and prepares for a new national planning framework.

At the same time, the partnership is actively responding to emerging risks and opportunities, including updated population projections, infrastructure funding pressures, housing delivery barriers, and national policy reform.

Preparing for the Regional Spatial Plan

The March 2026 SmartGrowth Leadership Group (SLG) meeting and workshop focused on the implications of the upcoming Planning Bill and the requirement to prepare a Regional Spatial Plan (RSP). This represents a significant shift in how spatial planning, infrastructure investment, and land use integration will occur across the Bay of Plenty. This will become the primary statutory framework guiding urban growth and infrastructure sequencing.

The March SLG workshop confirmed that early preparation for the RSP is essential, with tight statutory timeframes anticipated following enactment of the Planning Bill.



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Key points include:

- A 30+ year RSP will be required for each region
- Draft RSPs must be prepared for notification within approximately 15 months of legislation enactment
- A regional framework will integrate infrastructure, environmental limits, transport, and hazard planning
- Subregional chapters will provide place-based detail

The workshop reinforced that SmartGrowth's existing programme will form a core input into the RSP. Encouragingly, the region is well positioned with full coverage from recent work on subregional spatial plans. The SmartGrowth Strategy 2024, Future Development Strategy, and Implementation Plan provide a strong foundation for the subregional chapter of the RSP, enabling the partnership to build on existing work rather than starting again.

However, several strategic risks were identified:

- Uncertainty in national direction and legislative detail along with challenging timeframes
- High population growth targets and implications for land supply
- Infrastructure funding constraints
- Evolving roles of local government and co-governance arrangements
- The need to better integrate energy infrastructure planning

Submission on Resource Management Reforms

SmartGrowth made a joint submission from local government partners and the Combined Tāngata Whenua Forum on the Planning and Natural Environment Bills, focusing mainly on the Regional Spatial Plan provisions.

The joint submission highlighted the following issues:

- Regional Spatial Plans require realistic timeframes and sequencing
- Leveraging existing spatial strategies, like the SmartGrowth Future Development Strategy, will improve efficiency and accelerate delivery
- Insufficient process rigour for a foundational statutory document with limited appeal rights, including the need for transparent evaluation reports;
- Tāngata whenua partnership is weakened at the point where decision-making is now concentrated
- Risk of misalignment across planning, infrastructure, funding, and climate frameworks

Development Opportunities Programme

The programme provides a useful mechanism for coordinated assessment of urban growth proposals that sit outside the current Future Development Strategy and provides an input into future RSP considerations.

Following the close of Expressions of Interest in late 2025, the programme has moved into a more detailed assessment and engagement phase.

The SLG confirmed that:

- A further round of engagement with respondents will occur
- This engagement will inform recommendations to SLG in June 2026

The individual proposals remain confidential at this time.

Population Projections



Updated Stats NZ population projections indicate materially higher growth than previously anticipated based on higher inward migration and fertility rates. If these projections were used out to 2053, with the indicated 20% margin applied under the Going for Housing Growth policy initiative, the subregion would need to plan for 90,000 more people than are currently projected.

A regional review of projections is being commissioned. The review will focus on promoting consistency across the Bay of Plenty and with Waikato region.

Housing System Plan – Refresh Underway

Focus areas include:

- Improving data and system visibility
- Addressing housing delivery barriers and feasibility challenges
- Identifying practical delivery actions over the next 3–5 years

A refreshed Housing System Plan is targeted for completion in 2026, expected to have a strong emphasis on overcoming implementation barriers.



Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor Spatial Study Adopted

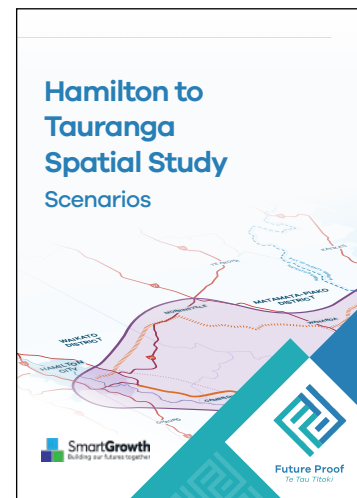
Future Proof, in partnership with SmartGrowth, has completed a year-long study that identifies potential growth impacts of transport improvements (including Roads of National Significance) in the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor.

The study has been endorsed in principle by both SLG and the Future Proof Implementation Committee (the Hamilton, Waikato, Waipa, Matamata-Piako urban growth partnership). This joint study confirms that growth induced by transport investment is largely anticipated within existing Future Development Strategies for both regions.

Other key findings include:

- Major transport investments are likely to influence land use more significantly in smaller settlements like Matamata, Tirau, and Cambridge
- There is no immediate need to increase land supply, but ongoing monitoring is essential
- The study will provide a strategic framework to inform an interregional chapter of the future Regional Spatial Plan

The work highlighted the importance of integrated land use and transport planning as accessibility between regions improves.



Strategic Transport Planning

NZTA is progressing two major transport planning initiatives:

- Hamilton–Tauranga Strategic Corridor Plan
- Tauranga Strategic Urban Network Plan

These plans will:

- Bridge the gap between strategic direction and delivery
- Identify future capacity constraints and network roles
- Consider multi-modal transport, including freight and public transport
- Inform long-term infrastructure investment decisions

The Hamilton–Tauranga Strategic Corridor Plan will be informed by the findings on future land use patterns of the Hamilton-Tauranga Corridor Spatial Study.

The transport plans are expected to be completed by late 2026 and will directly inform spatial planning, including the Regional Spatial Plan.

What's Next?

Over the coming quarter, SmartGrowth will:

- Provide input to early work for the Regional Spatial Plan, including governance and process arrangements
- Review and refine Implementation Plan “Key Actions” to reflect changes in the operating environment and to align with the emerging Regional Spatial Plan. An updated Implementation Plan will be completed by mid-2026
- Complete the Development Opportunities engagement phase and report to SLG
- Progress the population projections review
- Advance the Housing System Plan refresh
- Continue collaboration with NZTA and Future Proof on transport and corridor planning

The next SmartGrowth Leadership Group meeting is scheduled for June 2026.

Ngā mihi maioha,
The SmartGrowth Team

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tāngata whenua
partners



Find out more at smartgrowthbop.org.nz
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SmartGrowth is the urban growth partnership for the western Bay of Plenty – involving tāngata whenua, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Tauranga City Council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council and central government agencies. The purpose of SmartGrowth is to take a collaborative and coordinated approach to managing and shaping growth within the western Bay of Plenty sub-region.