

SmartGrowth
Building our futures together

Update July 2026

Building Confidence for Long-Term Growth

Growth conditions in the western Bay of Plenty are currently softer than in recent years, reflecting wider market, funding and delivery pressures.

At the same time, the sub-region still needs to plan confidently for significant long-term population growth, housing demand and infrastructure investment over the next 30 years and beyond.

This is also time of significant change, with local government reforms, central government reorganisation, and significant reform of the resource management and planning system on the horizon.

While the planning framework is evolving, the fundamental growth challenges facing the western Bay of Plenty remain unchanged. SmartGrowth continues to provide the long-term strategic direction that enables partners to respond to those challenges in a coordinated way.

This SmartGrowth update outlines some of the key work underway across the SmartGrowth partnership.



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Regional Spatial Planning – the next generation of growth management

SmartGrowth is preparing for the transition to the Government's proposed Regional Spatial Planning framework under the new Planning Act, to be enacted later this year.

Regional Spatial Plans are expected to become the main long-term framework for integrating land use, infrastructure, transport, environmental management and investment decisions.

While the legislation is still being finalised, SmartGrowth partners are identifying and sequencing the key workstreams that will support future Regional Spatial Plan preparation, including a refreshed western Bay of Plenty subregional spatial plan chapter.

This work includes population projections, housing and business land assessments,

commercial centres strategy, infrastructure planning, transport corridor studies, and Marae-centred spatial planning initiatives, building from the current SmartGrowth Strategy and Future Development Strategy.

The objectives include ensuring that the substantial body of spatial planning work already completed by the subregional community through SmartGrowth provides the foundation for future regional spatial planning, rather than being duplicated or lost through the transition.

However, the transition is not simply one of carrying forward existing work. New legislative requirements, evolving national priorities and emerging regional issues will also need to be integrated into the future Regional Spatial Plan.

Regional Deal adds a new delivery mechanism



The Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal announced in May is an important new delivery mechanism for parts of the sub-region's growth programme.

The Deal is not a replacement for the SmartGrowth Strategy or Future Development Strategy. Rather, it provides a further mechanism to help progress agreed priorities, particularly where greater central and local government coordination for infrastructure investment, funding tools and implementation discipline are needed.

There is clear alignment between the Deal and several existing SmartGrowth priorities, including transport investment, housing supply, infrastructure planning, Priority Development Areas and economic development, and the need for a refreshed western Bay of Plenty subregional spatial plan.

The 2026 SmartGrowth Implementation Plan update includes amendments to reflect those areas of alignment. Further changes may be required as the Regional Deal Implementation Plan is developed and delivery arrangements become clearer over the next few months.

[Read the **Regional Deal** here](#)

[Read the **SmartGrowth Implementation Plan** here](#)



Regional population projections under review

One of the key pieces of work currently underway is a review of long-term population projections for the Bay of Plenty region.

Population projections are a critical input to growth management. They influence a wide range of decisions on future housing and business land requirements, infrastructure investment, transport planning, community facilities and long-term funding priorities.

Population projections will play an increasingly important role as central government develops new housing growth targets and Regional Spatial Planning arrangements.

A regional review of population projections has been commissioned to assess recent Statistics New Zealand subnational projections, test key assumptions, and provide greater confidence that long-term planning decisions across the Bay of Plenty are based on robust and consistent evidence.

The review confirms that population growth remains one of the most significant uncertainties facing planning, particularly given the substantial influence of migration on subregional growth. The review also highlights the importance of regularly reviewing assumptions to ensure that growth planning remains responsive to changing circumstances.

The report provides valuable insights into the drivers of population growth and the implications for long-term planning across the Bay of Plenty.

The report concludes that Stats NZ projections are a useful official starting point but should not be treated as forecasts or as a complete local growth model. They need to be supplemented with local evidence, regular monitoring and scenario testing.

 [Read the Population Projections Review here](#)



Housing System Plan focuses on delivery

The Housing Working Group has made significant progress refreshing the Housing System Plan for the subregion.

"Homes for Everyone" is one of the SmartGrowth Strategy's Transformational Shifts. The Housing System Plan is the principal implementation mechanism for this outcome, bringing together partners around a focused programme of actions to address the most significant housing challenges facing the sub-region.

A key outcome of recent workshops has been agreement to focus on a small number of well-focused actions where collective effort can make a meaningful difference to housing outcomes. This represents a deliberate shift away from a broad list of possible initiatives towards a more targeted programme of practical actions.

These priorities include development of a Subregional Housing Story to strengthen the evidence base for local, regional and national level decision-making, improved identification and escalation of housing delivery barriers, stronger subregional engagement with government housing investment programmes, and initiatives that support housing choice, affordability and Māori housing aspirations.

The refreshed Housing System Plan is intended to complement the activities already undertaken by councils, government agencies, community housing providers and the private sector, while helping to identify opportunities for greater collaboration and influence.

The refreshed Housing System Plan is expected to be completed and considered by the SmartGrowth Leadership Group later this year.

Implementation of the agreed actions will become a key focus over the coming year, with progress monitored through the Housing Working Group.



What's Next?

The next 12 months are likely to be pivotal for growth management in the western Bay of Plenty. Decisions made during this period will help shape the region's future planning framework, housing delivery programme and infrastructure investment priorities for decades to come.

The transition to Regional Spatial Planning, implementation of the Regional Deal, updated population projections and continuing pressure on housing and infrastructure systems will all influence how growth is managed across the sub-region.

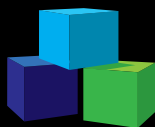
SmartGrowth's focus will remain on ensuring that planning, infrastructure and investment decisions are aligned, evidence-based and capable of supporting sustainable growth over the long term.

The next SmartGrowth Leadership Group meeting is scheduled for 17 September 2026.

Ngā mihi maioha,

Mayor James Denyer
Chairperson, SmartGrowth Leadership Group

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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.