Wellington Region Head Start Proposal

09 August 2026

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Executive summary

A proposal for a stronger Wellington region

A region positioned for growth and opportunity

The Wellington region has the foundations to be one of New Zealand's most successful and liveable regions*. The region combines a strong and diverse economy, nationally significant infrastructure, distinctive urban and rural communities, and a rich natural environment. Over the next 30 years, it is expected to accommodate substantial population growth, new housing demand and continued economic development.

Meeting these opportunities will require governance arrangements that can support growth, protect the environment, strengthen regional prosperity, and deliver high-quality services for communities.

The vision underpinning this proposal is for a region that can grow, thrive and adapt to future challenges through stronger regional leadership, effective local representation, enduring partnerships with mana whenua, and financially sustainable service delivery.

Why change is needed

While the region increasingly functions as a single economic, environmental and social system, it continues to be governed through a fragmented structure comprising one regional council and eight territorial authorities.

People, businesses, infrastructure networks and natural systems regularly operate across council boundaries, yet strategic decisions often require coordination across multiple organisations.

Councils are also facing increasing financial pressures, infrastructure investment requirements, capability constraints and growing expectations from communities. These challenges are expected to intensify as the region grows and as the new planning system is implemented.

A new model for regional success

This proposal seeks Government approval under the Head Start pathway to establish a Wellington-Wairarapa Unitary Authority supported by five or more empowered Community Councils. The model is designed to combine the benefits of regional scale with strong local representation and decision-making.

A directly elected Regional Mayor and Unitary Authority governing body would provide unified regional leadership, while Community Councils would retain responsibility for local priorities, community outcomes and place-based decision-making. Community Councils would also play an important role in catchment-based planning and environmental management.

Delivering better outcomes

The proposed model would create a single integrated planning framework that brings together growth, infrastructure, transport, environmental management and investment decisions. It would strengthen financial resilience, reduce duplication, improve organisational capability, and provide clearer accountability for regional outcomes.

The proposal also embeds a positive and constructive relationship with mana whenua and protects Treaty settlement commitments. Independent financial analysis indicates that amalgamation can improve long-term financial sustainability while significantly increasing resilience to future shocks.

A practical and deliverable pathway

Assessment against the Government's criteria indicates that the proposal strongly supports planning reform, simplifies local governance, enables economies of scale, maintains local voice and is deliverable within the Government's timeframe.

The proposal therefore seeks Government agreement to proceed to detailed design and implementation planning, supported by enabling legislation, transition arrangements and a collaborative pathway to establishment by the 2028 local elections.

*The Wellington region, also known as Greater Wellington or *Te Upoko o te Ika a Māui*, is the area at the southernmost tip of New Zealand's North Island. It covers 8,049 square kilometres, spanning urban centres, rural towns, and regional parks. Territorial authorities within this region include Wellington City Council, Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council, Upper Hutt City Council, Kāpiti Coast District Council, Masterton District Council, Carterton Council, and South Wairarapa District Council.

From fragmented governance to a unified regional model

Current

Regional Council and eight Territorial Authorities

Greater Wellington Regional Council

- Regional Council Chair
- Regional Council Members

Territorial Authorities (x8)

- Wellington City Council
- Hutt City Council
- Upper Hutt City Council
- Porirua City Council
- Kāpiti Coast District Council
- Masterton District Council
- Carterton District Council
- South Wairarapa District Council

Mayors x8

Chief Executives x8

Territorial authority members x82

Community boards exist in Tawa and Mākara–Ōhāriu in Wellington City, Wainuiomata and Eastbourne in Lower Hutt, Paekākāriki, Raumati, Paraparaumu, Waikanae and Ōtaki on the Kāpiti Coast. Greytown, Martinborough, and Featherston in the Wairarapa.

Community Board Members x61

Proposed

Wellington-Wairarapa Unitary Authority and five Community Councils

Unitary Authority Governing Body

- Regional Mayor
- Unitary Councillors (elected in wards)
- Community Council Chairs
- Māori wards

Five or more Community Councils

- Community Council chair
- Community Councillors (including Māori wards)

With some combination comprising

- *Wairarapa*
- *Kāpiti*
- *North Wellington / Porirua*
- *Hutt City / Upper Hutt / Te Awakairangi*
- *Central Wellington / Pōneke*

(Names are tentative – to be agreed, including with mana whenua)

Regional CCO structures deliver scale and specialist benefits, where appropriate (to be explored in the next phase)

Our case for change

How we developed this proposal

The Head Start pathway compresses a process that has historically taken years into three months. The participating councils consider themselves best placed to determine the arrangements that will serve their communities and have chosen to put forward this proposal rather than wait. In doing so, they can shape the policy, legislative, and funding settings for delivering services in the best way.

Purpose

This proposal is submitted to Cabinet under the Head Start pathway established in Simplifying Local Government (May 2026). It sets out a proposal from Hutt City Council (HCC), Porirua City Council (PCC), South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC), and Wellington City Council (WCC) to establish a new Unitary Authority covering the Wellington Region in place for the 2028 local elections.

The proposal asks Government to:

- **Accept** this proposal into the detailed design phase, on the basis that it meets the five assessment criteria.
- **Agree** in principle to the governance arrangements and coverage set out in the Our Proposal section.
- **Confirm** the support needed to progress the proposal, including officials' engagement, data access, and transitional arrangements.

Developed jointly by the participating councils through the Wellington-Wairarapa Region Mayoral Forum, the proposal draws on community testing, iwi and Post-Settlement Governance Entity engagement, and analysis against the five Cabinet criteria. It reflects a shared regional view that structural change is both necessary and deliverable within the Head Start timeframe, and that participating councils are best placed to lead rather than await the legislative backstop.

The process we followed

This proposal builds on work commissioned by the Wellington Region Mayoral Forum from December 2025, including the 8 May 2026 Case for Change workshop, subsequent Mayoral Forum decisions, and parallel iwi and Post-Settlement Governance Entity engagement through a dedicated workstream. Community engagement, led by individual councils, also took place though this was limited by the timeframe. Horowhenua District Council participated in the process as an out-of-region observer.

The proposal reflects regional principles tested against the five Cabinet criteria, analysis of communities of interest, and assessment of financial sustainability and model choices.

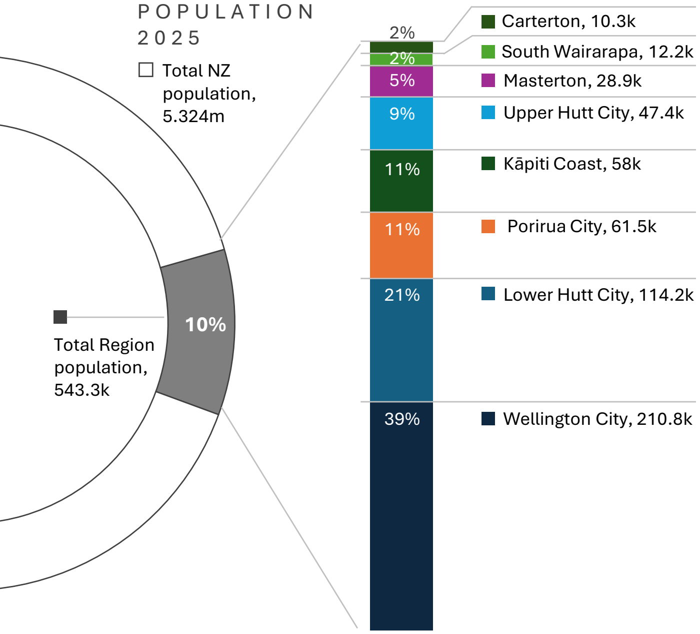
The participating councils acknowledge that not all councils in the region are at the same point. Not every council supports this proposal, and the views of individual Councils are respected and conveyed in good faith.

This proposal is one of two that will be submitted by councils within the Wellington region. This proposal is a region-wide unitary proposal supported by Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council, South Wairarapa District Council, and Wellington City Council, councils that together represent more than 73% of the region’s population and 86% of the region’s GDP. The second proposal is for a Wairarapa unitary proposal supported by Carterton District Council and Masterton District Council (this will be submitted separately to this proposal). These proposals reflect the positions of the individual councils involved.

Kāpiti Coast District Council and Upper Hutt City Council have not agreed to be part of this proposal, and on their behalf, we convey their request for some form of offramp for them from the Head Start pathway.

The demographic, economic and land-use patterns that define the region

POPULATION 2025



Regional population is densely concentrated in the urban core with 60% residing in Wellington City and Lower Hutt City.

Table 1. Projected population growth, 2025-2053

TA	Growth (n) to 2053	Growth (%)
Wellington City	19,700	9%
Lower Hutt City	15,700	14%
Porirua City	8,400	14%
Kāpiti Coast	7,300	13%
Upper Hutt City	7,300	15%
Masterton	5,400	19%
South Wairarapa	2,850	23%
Carterton	1,750	17%
Total	**58,400**	**13%**

Source: Statistics New Zealand estimated resident population (June 2025) and medium population projections to 2053

LAND USE

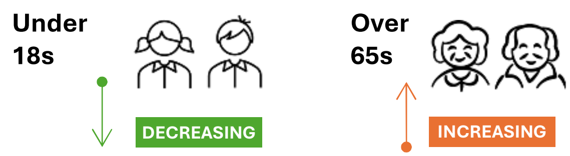
Table 2. Land use patterns and characteristics

Wellington City Urban Core	Concentrated residential, commercial, and industrial land use. Limited space for primary production.
Lower Hutt City Urban Valley	Mix of residential, commercial, and industrial land use. Urban intensification is a planning focus.
Porirua City Mixed urban/suburban	Residential, some rural land, multicultural communities, family-oriented suburbs.
Kāpiti Coast Productive soils	Rural, horticultural, lifestyle blocks, coastal settlements, recreational land use.
Upper Hutt City Urban Valley	Residential and suburban development, some rural land.
Masterton Highly productive rural	Primary production (agriculture, horticulture, forestry), rural and lifestyle blocks.
South Wairarapa Rural	Primary production, lifestyle blocks, smaller scale settlements.
Carterton Rural	Primary production, lifestyle blocks, smaller scale settlements.

DEMOGRAPHICS

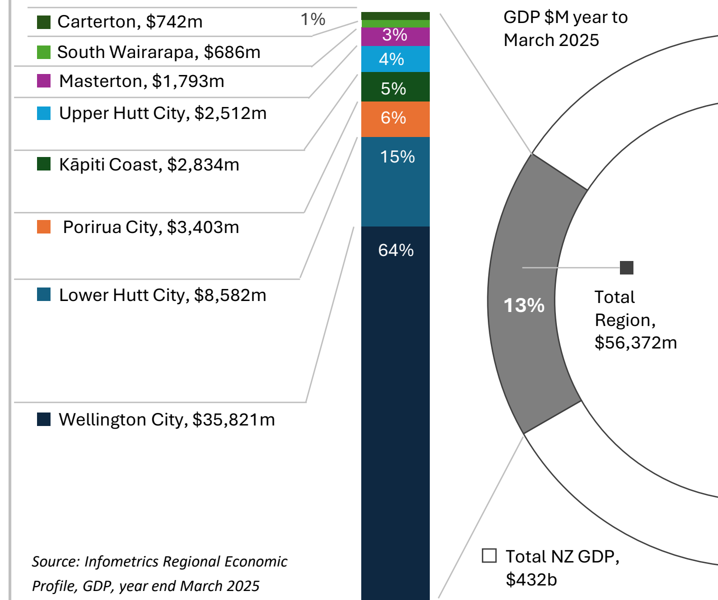
The urban core is younger than the rural areas. The region is ageing overall, with a decrease in under 18s and a 30% increase in aged 65+ in the last 10 years.

Population by change in the last 10 years



Source: Statistics New Zealand population estimates and demographic trends, 2015-2025

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

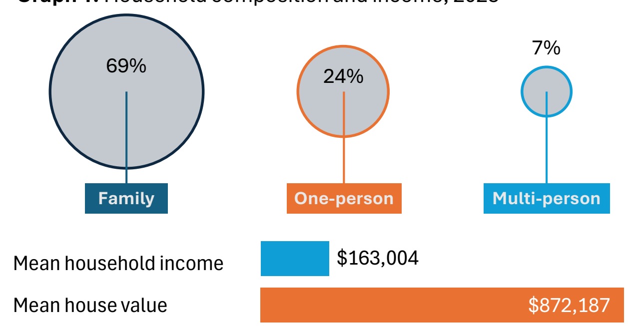


Source: Infometrics Regional Economic Profile, GDP, year end March 2025

HOUSEHOLDS & INCOME

The Wellington/Wairarapa region's population is concentrated in urban centres, with Wellington City and Lower Hutt making up 60% of the total.

Graph 1. Household composition and income, 2025



Source: Infometrics Regional Economic Profile, 2025

The region operates as a multi-layered system of communities of interest

We undertook an initial communities of interest analysis to inform this proposal.

If approved by Government, further work will be undertaken during the detailed design phase to inform the consideration of administrative boundaries, governance arrangements and local representation models.

Communities of interest do not align neatly with existing territorial authority boundaries

The analysis indicates that the Wellington Region operates as a multi-layered system of communities of interest, with connections and identities that exist at regional, sub-regional and neighbourhood scales. It also highlights that communities of interest do not align neatly with existing territorial authority boundaries or regional systems, instead operating across multiple spatial scales.

Mana whenua relationships, iwi rohe, Treaty settlement arrangements and statutory acknowledgements form additional spatial layers that extend across administrative boundaries and must also be recognised in any future design work.

Regional systems coexist with strong local identities

At a regional level, there is a high degree of integration across economic activity, infrastructure and service systems. People regularly travel across territorial authority boundaries for work, education, services and recreation. Key networks such as transport, health, water and energy operate across the region, while major assets including Wellington Airport, CentrePort and Wellington Regional Hospital serve communities well beyond their host territorial authorities.

High levels of daily commuting, particularly along the western corridor linking Kāpiti Coast, Porirua, Wellington and the Hutt Valley, demonstrate that much of the region functions as a single labour market. Similar functional connections extend east through Upper Hutt into the Wairarapa and north to the Kāpiti Coast.

The region also contains **distinct sub-regional communities of interest**, including the Hutt Valley, Wellington-Porirua corridor, Kāpiti Coast and Wairarapa. These areas reflect shared patterns of service use, economic activity, geography and community identity.

At a more local level, neighbourhoods are the strongest expression of day-to-day community identity. These places shape social connection, civic participation and people's lived experience.

Catchments reflect functional relationships better than administrative boundaries

Catchments provide a functional geography that often better reflects how environmental systems, hazards and infrastructure networks operate in practice. Unlike territorial authority boundaries, catchments frequently span multiple jurisdictions, requiring coordinated planning, investment and management across council boundaries. This is particularly evident in water, flood management and natural hazard planning. Drawing on catchment geographies can therefore help align governance and decision-making with the systems being managed.

The region faces challenges that the current system is not designed to solve

Why is change needed?

1. **The region operates as an integrated system, but is governed as nine separate parts:** People, businesses and infrastructure operate across council boundaries every day, but governance and decision-making remain fragmented. Businesses face different rules across jurisdictions for the same issues, strategic decisions require coordination across multiple councils, and mana whenua engage repeatedly with multiple councils on the same matters.
2. **Financial pressures are tightening, and the current structure makes them harder to manage:** Financial headroom across local government is tightening at a pace the sector has not faced in a generation. Reform does not automatically deliver savings, but better-aligned governance can support more sustainable investment, reduce duplication across corporate and regulatory functions, and avoid costs being shifted to the next generation of ratepayers.
3. **Capability, capacity and resilience are stretched across too many organisations:** Councils are competing for the same specialist skills while managing increasingly complex responsibilities. The pending planning system changes sharpen this challenge. A Regional Spatial Plan, a new Combined Plan and aligned Regional Land Transport and Long-Term Plans will require integrated data, common processes and consistent regulatory practice across what are currently nine separate operating environments.
4. **Local democracy and trust need to be rebuilt, and structural change is an opportunity to do that:** Public trust in local government has been declining for decades, with recent local election turnout sitting around 42%. While our communities are amongst the most engaged in the country there is room to strengthen connection to community.

What is our vision of success?

- ✓ **We want to see the region grow and communities thrive**: Over the next 30 years, the region is expected to accommodate around 200,000 additional residents and 99,000 more homes. Meeting this challenge will require more land for housing, business and industry, new community facilities and services, and significant investment in the infrastructure needed to support current demand and future growth.
- ✓ **Our Te Tiriti partnership is embedded throughout the model and transition:** Mana whenua seek a future where Te Tiriti partnership is embedded in how the region is governed, planned, and developed. Any future model must uphold Treaty settlements, protect existing rights and responsibilities, and provide meaningful opportunities for mana whenua to participate in decision-making as partners, rights holders and kaitiaki.
- ✓ **A model that delivers for Wellington-Wairarapa:** Our ambition is a region that can grow, thrive and adapt to future challenges, supported by effective governance, strong local representation and enduring partnerships with mana whenua. Our reform framework defines both the outcomes sought for the region and the characteristics of a successful model. This framework has guided the development of options and the identification of the preferred proposal.
- ✓ **Reform is delivered through a fair, transparent and trusted transition:** Change is delivered in a way that maintains continuity of services, builds public confidence, provides opportunities for community input, and protects the interests of communities, mana whenua and stakeholders.

Lessons from past reforms shaped our design

Strong local voice and regional coordination work best when designed together

Effective governance arrangements balance regional integration with local decision-making. Local boards, community councils, and other place-based structures are most effective when they have meaningful authority, clear responsibilities, and the resources needed to represent and respond to their communities. They require defined powers and independent or delegated budgets. Advisory-only models tend to undermine overall design.

Lasting reform is built on a compelling case for change and community confidence

Successful reform depends on community mandate as much as technical design. Building legitimacy requires a clear rationale for change, meaningful engagement, transparency, and a strong understanding of communities' interests and priorities. Support for reform is strongest when communities understand the benefits, costs and trade-offs of the proposed changes.

Implementation determines whether reform delivers its intended benefits

Structural change alone does not improve outcomes, and Transition complexity is often underestimated, making dedicated implementation capacity and effective change management critical to success. Effective implementation requires strong leadership, disciplined programme management, careful transition planning, and sustained focus on integrating people, systems, and services.

Effective systems balance integration with subsidiarity

To find balance, unitary models require strong local mandate, two-tier models require strong coordination mechanisms, and hybrid models need clear triggers for regional action. Regional and local functions are best defined by comprehensively understanding communities of interest.

There needs to be clear accountability and roles

Roles should be clearly defined, particularly between regional and local decision-making. Decision-making should be open, with clear accountability for performance, spending, and the stewardship of public assets. Where functions are delivered through entities such as CCOs, roles, expectations, and oversight must be clearly defined to maintain alignment with strategic priorities and democratic accountability.

Where roles, responsibilities, or decision rights are unclear or overly complex, systems default to informal workarounds. This risks embedding fragmentation rather than resolving it, so collaboration and coordination mechanisms need to be built into the structure, not left to discretion.

What this means for our model

- ✓ **The case for change is region-wide:** the proposal needs to focus on the real benefits of a region wide leadership anchored in planning system, economic, and wider environmental and social/cultural context.
- ✓ **Design must maximise democratic participation and modernised representation:** arrangements must reflect diverse communities of interest, balancing local autonomy with the scale needed for regional outcomes (rural and urban).
- ✓ **Local or community layers need enough heft and authority:** devolution and delegation needs to be matched with funding and accountability in substance. This needs to be matched by a good line of accountability back to a Governing Body as well as communities.
- ✓ **Make financial planning transparent and credible:** robust financial analysis is important but with conservative assumptions, including transition costs. The real benefit is long term financial sustainability.

Our reform framework guided the design of the proposal

PURPOSE:

The proposal seeks to establish local government structures for the Wellington-Wairarapa region that strengthen a unified regional voice while collectively delivering for growth, the environment, and all communities. This proposal will amplify shared regional priorities underpinned by a strong planning system. This will enable us to partner more effectively, incorporate strong local representation and voice, and include mana whenua in decision making consistent with Treaty partnership. The proposal will also position the region as a place of opportunity, creativity, and innovation, while supporting enduring financial sustainability and resilience for our communities.

REGIONAL OBJECTIVES:

What the reform needs to achieve for the region

1. Improved effectiveness and efficiency in supporting population and economic growth and environmental protection
2. Effective local representation
3. Mana whenua included in governance, consistent with Treaty settlements and obligations
4. Promote and enhance the region's reputation as a place of opportunity, creativity and innovation
5. Ensure affordability for ratepayers and long-term financial sustainability

DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

What a good model should look like for our communities

1. Regional where it adds value, local where it matters most
2. Local voice and democratic legitimacy
3. Affordable and financially sustainable over time
4. Active partnership with mana whenua
5. Capability to deliver including people, systems, and knowledge

The principles that will guide transition and implementation

Councils have also endorsed the approach to the transition as this process is important for enduring success. These ways of working would shape the deliverability of the proposal and guide any transition beyond August.

1

A clear and consistent case for change

The case for change must be clear, future-focused, and communicated consistently across the councils and their communities. People need to understand what will be better and why it matters to their daily lives or not. The case for change should be carried through every engagement, document, and decision point, in plain language that connects to communities.

2

Community trust and confidence

Sustainable change requires community understanding, trust, confidence and involvement. This is built through engagement and continues through implementation. Communities should see how their input will be able to shape design, and where it has not, why. Trust is earned through process as well as outcome and is the biggest determinant of whether reform beds in or is contested for years.

3

Protect what communities rely on

Reliable services for communities is the baseline condition for reform, not a trade-off against it. The community is the reason for change and must stay at its centre, which means uninterrupted delivery is the test against which each transition decision is weighed. Transition should be planned, sequenced and resourced so that disruption is anticipated and managed.

4

A fair process for people and place

Structural change has real consequences for people's jobs, for suppliers and contractors, and for the local economies built around current arrangements. A fair process means transparent decision-making, genuine consultation with staff. Fairness in how the change is done is part of its legitimacy.

5

In partnership with mana whenua

Sustainable reform requires partnership with mana whenua from the outset, with a clear transition pathway that protects existing rights, maintains settlement integrity, and strengthens partnership arrangements through change.

Our proposal

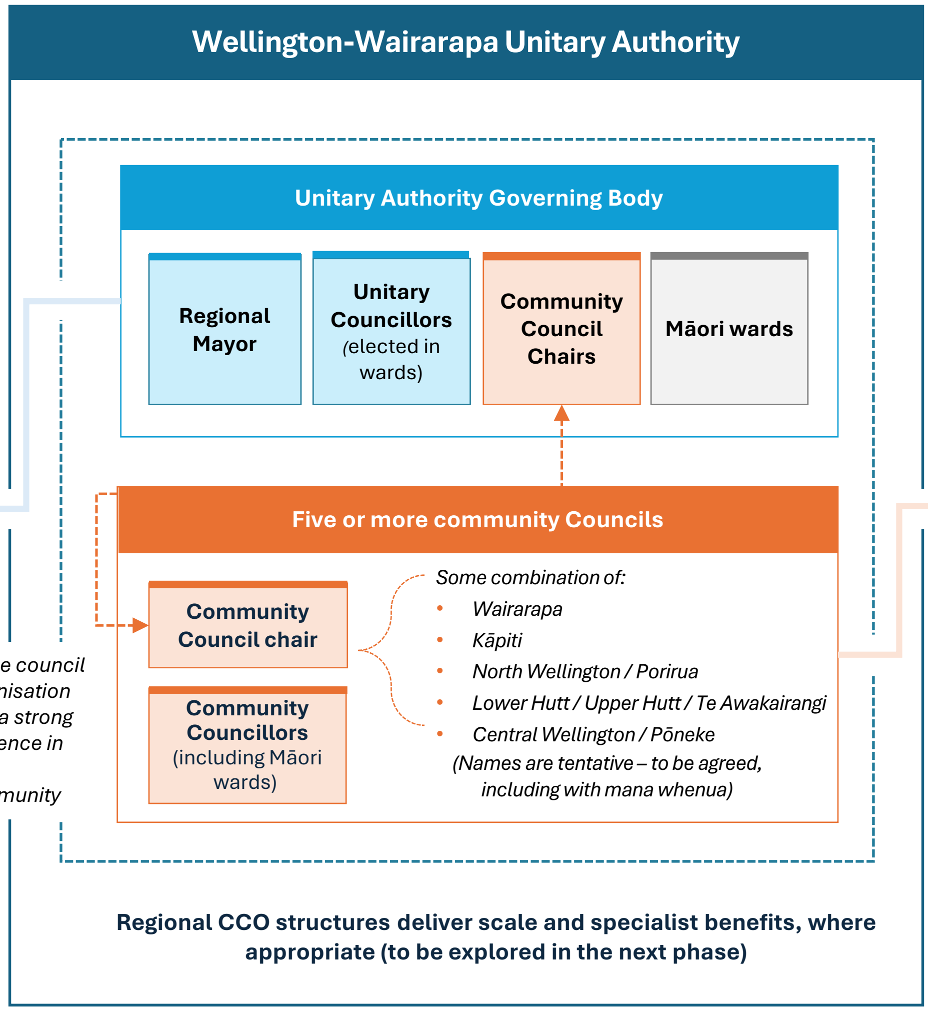
Our preferred model is a Unitary Authority with empowered local governance

A region-wide Unitary Authority would be established as the primary governing entity for the region.

This would be led by a **Regional Mayor who is elected at large and has executive powers** (with appropriate disciplines).

They would be supported by a governing body that comprises **Unitary Councillors**, and **Community Council Chairs**. Community Council Chairs would be elected at large from the Community Council area, and Unitary Councillors would be elected from wards within the Community Council area.

The Unitary Governing Body would be responsible for setting strategic direction, making region-wide investment decisions, establishing minimum service levels, and delivering services at the scale that best serves communities.



Five Community Councils would form part of the governance structure.

Community Councils would comprise **elected councillors and a Chair.** The **Chair would serve on both the Community Council and the Unitary Authority** (and would be elected on that basis). The final nature of the relationship between these layers and the basis of election would be dependent on the final model.

They would have clearly defined decision-making responsibilities and devolved funding to support local priorities, local service delivery, and community outcomes.

They would also play a key role in catchment-based governance and planning, with delegated responsibilities for matters such as spatial planning, environmental management, freshwater and flood protection consistent with the new planning system.

This catchment level interaction is a key basis for a strengthened relationship with mana whenua, including as required by Treaty settlements.

How the model would operate in practice

Strong regional leadership would provide a unified voice and clear accountability for the region

A region-wide Unitary Authority would be established as the primary governing entity for the region, led by a directly elected Regional Mayor with executive powers (with appropriate disciplines) and supported by a governing body responsible for setting strategic direction, making investment decisions, establishing service levels, and delivering services at the scale that best serves communities. The Regional Mayor would provide visible regional leadership, and drive delivery of key priorities.

Regional functions would be brought together to improve capability, consistency and long-term performance

Functions that benefit from scale, consistency, specialist capability and long-term planning would be brought together within an organisation. The Unitary Authority would be responsible for the long-term plan, overall financial strategy, infrastructure planning and investment, regional transport, environmental management, regulatory services, economic development, climate change response, and the region's broader strategic direction.

A balance sheet, integrated planning framework, consistent service standards and shared corporate services would strengthen capability, improve efficiency, support financial sustainability and provide a stronger platform for the region's long-term growth, resilience and prosperity.

Community Councils would provide strong local leadership, decision-making and community voice

Community Councils would form an integral part of the governance structure, with clearly defined decision-making responsibilities and devolved funding to support local priorities. They would provide local representation and engagement, shape local and community priorities, allocate devolved budgets, oversee local placemaking and community development initiatives, and influence the local delivery of regional services.

To strengthen alignment between regional and local decision-making, representatives could be elected through a dual-mandate model, with councillors serving on both the Unitary Authority and their respective Community Council.

Community Councils would also act as catchment-based planning and environmental governance bodies

Community Councils would have a dual role as both local governance bodies and catchment-based planning and environmental committees. In addition to overseeing local service priorities and community outcomes, they would provide a forum for place-based decision-making across natural catchments and communities of interest. They would play a key role in shaping local spatial planning priorities, informing environmental management, freshwater and flood protection decisions, and helping integrate land-use, infrastructure and environmental considerations at the local level.

Community Councils would also help determine local parks and facilities investment, local events and grants, town-centre initiatives, local transport priorities, waste minimisation activities and other community-focused services. Through their governance and catchment functions, they would provide a formal mechanism for incorporating local knowledge, community priorities and place-based perspectives into regional decision-making while maintaining a coordinated region-wide approach.

The model delivers the outcomes that the region needs

A unified regional voice that can act at the scale its challenges demand

Allows the region to speak and act as one on the matters that cross boundaries, and amplifies shared priorities. Lets the region partner more effectively with central government, investors and mana whenua, rather than negotiating through nine separate mandates. A simplified local government structure also provides greater clarity about who is responsible for regional outcomes, reducing fragmentation and enabling more consistent decision-making across the region.

Integrated planning that gives effect to the new planning system

Combines regional and territorial functions in one organisation, aligning governance with how the new planning system is designed to work. It removes the seams between the Regional Spatial Plan, the Combined Plan and Long-Term Plans, so that growth, transport and land use decisions are made once and made together. Bringing functions together at scale also creates opportunities to reduce duplication, share specialist capability and realise economies of scale in planning, policy and corporate services.

Local voice protected where it matters most

Consolidation at the regional tier does not require the loss of local identity. The framework applies subsidiarity, keeping decisions local where they turn on community character, place and local relationships, while lifting to regional scale only those decisions that genuinely benefit from it. Effective local representation and democratic legitimacy are treated as design requirements, not afterthoughts.

A durable Treaty partnership with mana whenua

The proposal embeds mana whenua in governance consistent with Treaty settlements and obligations. By engaging post settlement governance entities early and providing for existing settlement arrangements to transfer with equivalent effect, the new Unitary Authority can strengthen these relationships rather than disrupt them, supporting an active and enduring partnership.

Financial sustainability and affordability over the long term

Councils across the region face growing financial pressure from rising operating and asset renewal costs, significant infrastructure investment requirements, declining operating performance, and increasing debt servicing costs. These pressures are contributing to higher rates, affordability challenges, reduced financial flexibility, and weaker resilience to shocks. A consolidated council model would enhance financial resilience by creating a larger, more diversified balance sheet and strengthening the region’s capacity to manage risk, absorb shocks, and fund future investment.

Capability to deliver, and a stronger regional reputation

A larger, better resourced organisation can attract and retain the specialists, systems and knowledge that smaller councils struggle to sustain alone. That capability underpins delivery across infrastructure, climate adaptation and housing growth, and it positions the region more credibly as a place of opportunity, creativity and innovation.

Summary financial metrics

- Councils sought high-level, indicative financial advice to inform their consideration of Head Start options. However, this analysis relies on a number of high-level assumptions that may not be applicable once proposals are more fully developed. A conservative approach was therefore taken which is prudent given the timeframe available.
- Amalgamation options offer the potential for savings net of transition costs. All amalgamation options have the potential to be net beneficial, but the extent of benefits varies with the scale and complexity of the option and depend on the assumptions made. On a per rating unit basis, the present value of net savings over 25 years falls within a narrow range of $3,900 to $4,500 across the options.
- The largest configurations offer the greatest financial resilience benefits. Under a $150 million shock, the Single Regional Unitary Authority and Western Area Unitary Authority configurations retain approximately $2.1-$2.6 billion of borrowing headroom, compared with $103 - $208 million for the North Western and Wairarapa unitary configurations. A shock of this size would represent a much smaller share of annual revenue for the larger Unitary Authority options (around 6–7%) than for the Wairarapa (77%) or North Western (41%) unitary options.

See the separate Independent Financial Sustainability Report for more detail

See Technical Appendix 1 for more detail

Functions would sit at the level best placed to deliver them

We undertook a functional analysis to determine which functions are best delivered at a regional scale and which are best delivered locally. Our functional analysis informed the design of the proposed governance model and the allocation of responsibilities between the Unitary Authority and Community Councils.

Key outcomes of our analysis:

- Functions that benefit from scale, specialist capability, long-term planning, network optimisation and purchasing power would sit with the Unitary Authority.
- Functions that depend on place-based decision-making, local relationships and community preferences would sit with Community Councils.
- Functions that require both regional coordination and local input would be supported through sub-regional and catchment-based arrangements, ensuring local conditions and priorities inform decision-making within a consistent regional framework.
- Functions need to be allocated to the level best placed to make decisions, reducing duplication while maintaining strong local influence.

The table opposite provides an example of how our functional analysis informed the allocation of governance and strategy responsibilities between regional and community levels. The indicative allocation of other functions is set out in **Technical Appendix 1.**

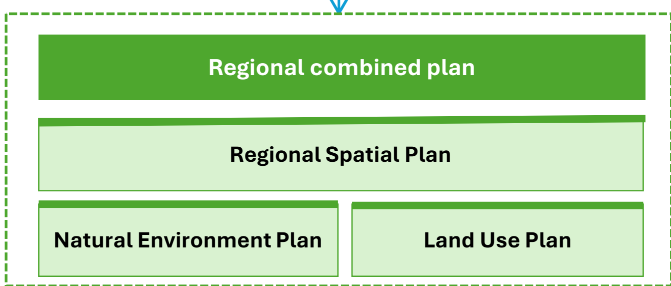
FUNCTION	COMMUNITY LEVEL	REGIONAL LEVEL
GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY		
Strategy, planning and finance	Local and community priorities feed into the long-term plan and financial strategy that supports it. Allocate a local share of discretionary capital and operating budgets invested in local communities, and trade-offs between local projects within an allocated envelope.	The long-term plan and overall financial strategy, region-wide infrastructure strategy, the revenue and financing policy, treasury, borrowing and the consolidated balance sheet, group-wide asset management, and the rating framework and rates harmonisation pathway.
Representation and engagement	Local or community plans and agreements, local engagement, and advocacy to the governing body on behalf of the community.	The overall governance and committee structure, region-wide consultation, and the representation review framework.
Emergency management	Local response delivery arrangements, community resilience initiatives, local welfare and recovery priorities.	The group plan, coordination, and region-wide readiness and response capability.
Regulatory functions	Local bylaw provisions where local conditions justify variation, local enforcement priorities (such as dog control or freedom camping), and the local deployment for services.	A regional building consent system. Other systems like environmental health, alcohol licensing administration, animal control, and the bylaw framework run as consistent region-wide system. While services are deployed locally, they also maintain a point of accountability, consistent standards, capability, and fairness across the region.

The model is designed to drive momentum for the new planning system

Unitary Authority Governing Body

The Unitary Authority has **overall responsibility for the planning system** and is the **owner of the regional combined plan,** ensuring a coherent and integrated framework across the region.

The Unitary Authority **prepares and adopts the regional spatial plan as one integrated framework**, and makes region-wide decisions to align growth, infrastructure and environmental outcomes.



Community Councils

Community Councils are responsible for **informing local network, community and catchment priorities within the planning system,** reflecting place-based needs, environmental conditions and community aspirations.

Land Use Plans and Natural Environment plans are required to implement the Regional Spatial Plan. Community Councils will help identify **community-scale development priorities, environmental outcomes and place-based responses**, and support with implementation.

An integrated planning system that provides certainty and simplifies delivery

One regional framework aligns spatial planning, infrastructure, transport and environmental management, replacing fragmented plans with a consistent system that improves clarity, reduces duplication and strengthens the link between growth and infrastructure.

Clearer governance that enables faster, more consistent decisions

The authority provides clear accountability, reduces decision-making layers, and enables more timely and consistent planning decisions, while offering a point of engagement for government and key partners.

Maintaining momentum and providing confidence through transition

Existing planning work continues within a unified structure, maintaining momentum, reducing disruption and duplication, and providing stability and a clear direction through the transition.

Managing natural systems at the right scale to improve environmental outcomes

A regional and catchment-based approach enables coordinated responses to cross-boundary challenges such as water quality, hazards and climate resilience, while still incorporating local conditions and perspectives.

See **Appendix 4.**

We considered a range of options before selecting a preferred model

A range of structural options were explored, from maintaining current arrangements through to more centralised or more highly devolved unitary models.

Highly centralised models were not progressed. While they provide stronger regional leadership, more integrated planning and investment, and greater efficiency, they reduce local voice, responsiveness and community influence.

LANDING ZONE

A "landing zone" emerged that combines strong regional leadership and accountability with meaningful local governance. The main difference between models is the degree of devolution, ranging from stronger regional consistency and coordination to greater local autonomy and influence over services and priorities, reflecting different balances between regional alignment and local responsiveness.

The status quo was discounted because it would continue fragmented governance and decision-making, limit regional coordination, create duplication and complexity across councils, and leave existing financial and capability pressures unresolved.

1 — CONSOLIDATED UNITARY AUTHORITY

Unitary Authority with a Community Council in the Wairarapa (with decision-making rights that recognise rural interests).

2 — CENTRALISED UNITARY AUTHORITY

Unitary Authority with a number of Community Councils that have limited decision-making rights delegated.

Nb. This is most like the Auckland model

3 — INTEGRATED UNITARY AUTHORITY

Unitary Authority with Community Councils with a directly elected Mayor/Chair who also sits on the Unitary Authority.

4 — DEVOLVED UNITARY AUTHORITY

Unitary Authority with a number of Community Councils with highly devolved budgetary and decision-making rights.

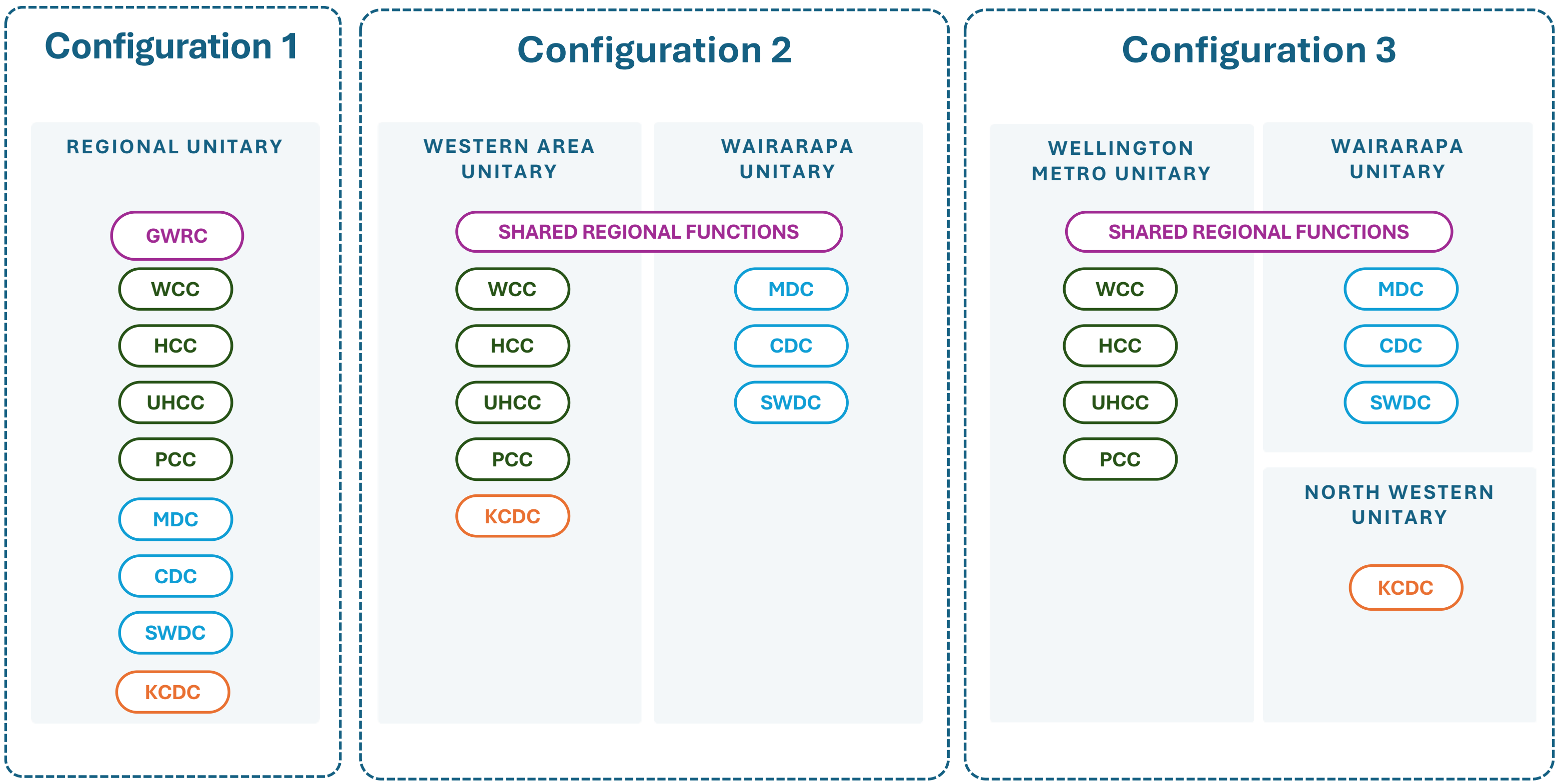
S — STATUS QUO

Eight territorial authorities (excl. Horowhenua), and one Regional Council.

Central influence — S_R — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — S_{TA} — ***Local influence***

In considering the options, councils undertook financial analysis informed by three different configurations

These configurations were financially viable. Configuration 1 best meets the Government's assessment criteria and is therefore presented in this proposal. Configurations involving multiple unitary authorities were less consistent with the Government's assessment criteria, especially those supporting a coherent planning framework and a simpler local government system.



Note: These configurations assume the functions of each organisation. They also assume the use of CCOs and mana whenua representation and participation.

Assessment

See Technical Appendix 1 and 2 for more detail

The preferred model performs strongly against the Government's assessment criteria and meets the eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria

- ✓ This proposal is submitted by WCC, HCC, PCC and SWDC. Together these councils represent a majority (73%*) of the population across directly affected districts
- ✓ This proposal provides for the establishment of a Unitary Authority as the primary governing entity for the region.
- ✓ Protecting Treaty settlements and maintaining partnership arrangements is a core part of this proposal. Councils have worked closely with mana whenua to identify the arrangements that must be preserved and strengthened through the transition. Technical Appendix 2 outlines the key partnership and settlement arrangements that would guide implementation of any future model.

- ✓ * Source Local Government Commission - Representation-tables-2025-estimates-2023-census-base-2026-boundaries

#	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	RATING	KEY POINTS	COMMENTARY
1	Supports the new planning system	HIGH	• Creates **one integrated planning system** • **Aligns growth, infrastructure and environmental outcomes** • Supports more **consistent rules and decisions**	Unitary Authority would bring spatial, land use and environmental planning into one coherent regional framework. This reduces fragmentation between current planning processes and provides clearer line of sight from regional strategy through to delivery.
2	Simplifies local governance	HIGH	• **Replaces multiple councils** with one structure • **Clarifies regional and local roles** • **Reduces duplication and complexity**	The model simplifies governance by creating one regional body for region-wide decisions, while retaining Community Councils for local priorities and place-based input. This creates a clearer system for communities, iwi and partners.
3	Economies of scale	HIGH	• **Consolidates** functions, assets and funding • Builds **specialist capability and purchasing power** • Supports more **efficient investment** and service delivery	Bringing functions into one organisation supports regional-scale planning, procurement and asset management. A single balance sheet also strengthens financial resilience and enables investment decisions to be made based on regional need rather than local boundaries.
4	Maintains local voice	HIGH	• Establishes Community Councils with defined roles • **Keeps local priorities visible** in decision-making • **Balances regional scale with local responsiveness**	The model retains local voice through a structured local layer. Community Councils would provide a mechanism for local representation, local priority-setting and community input into regional decisions, helping preserve place-based knowledge within a wider regional system.
5	Deliverability	HIGH	• Provides a **clear end-state model** • Can be **staged through transition planning** • Needs detailed implementation work	The model gives a clear destination for transition. Deliverability will depend on a credible implementation pathway, including sequencing for governance, staff, systems, assets, funding and service continuity ahead of the 2028 local elections.

It also aligns with the Government's wider goals

This proposal directly supports the Government's objective to simplify and modernise local government by replacing fragmented arrangements with an integrated regional system. It aligns structural reform with the new planning system and other reforms already underway, reducing duplication and creating a more coherent framework for planning, infrastructure and service delivery.

It supports the Government's focus on delivery, financial discipline and infrastructure outcomes.

The model is designed to be implementable within the 2028 timeframe, with targeted legislative support, and creates a platform for more coordinated investment in transport, housing and infrastructure.

Aligning local government reform with wider system transformation	Enables an integrated regional system aligned with planning, environmental and spatial reform already underway. Aligns local government reorganisation with wider system reforms to reduce duplication and transition complexity.
Delivering reform at pace within national timeframes	Implementation by the 2028 local elections is achievable with timely secondary legislation and regulatory clarity. Early decisions are required on governance arrangements, transition structures, and establishment settings.
Strengthening partnership between central and local government	Strengthens alignment between central and local government across infrastructure, housing, transport and investment planning. Creates opportunities for joint governance and funding models, particularly for transport and major infrastructure systems.
Managing transition in a financially sustainable and practical way	Supports more efficient transition through approaches such as streamlined Long-Term Plan processes and reduced audit requirements. Enables rates transition pathways (glidepaths) to manage establishment costs while maintaining service levels.
Positioning the region for longer-term national partnerships and investment	Positions the region to enter into a Regional Deal with central government. Supports alignment of economic development, housing delivery and long-term infrastructure investment priorities through integrated regional planning.

See Technical Appendix 2 for more detail

Treaty obligations and the views of mana whenua

The Head Start guidance sets out that any Treaty settlement arrangements that councils have with Post-settlement Governance Entities (PSGEs) must be upheld with the same or equivalent effect through the Head Start process. We have engaged with mana whenua (including PSGEs) to inform our proposal.

Our approach

As part of the work to develop this proposal, councils have worked closely with Iwi Māori (and PSGEs) through Te Kāhui Whakarehunga to arrive at a joint view. Their position is laid out in the attached letter to the cover letter of this proposal.

This work has confirmed that any future model would inherit more than functions and services. It would also inherit Treaty settlement commitments, statutory responsibilities, mana whenua relationships, iwi planning documents, Māori data interests, and wider Te Tiriti partnership obligations. These are core transition settings that will need to be carried forward with their full intent, effect, governance, resourcing and accountability preserved.

What must be protected through the transition

- **Treaty settlements and settlement redress continue to operate with their full intent and effect** recognising that many arrangements rely on governance structures, planning processes, decision-making rights, and established relationship.
- **Existing partnership commitments and Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements are maintained and strengthened** with clear pathways for how they will operate within the future model.
- **Governance arrangements must provide meaningful opportunities for mana whenua participation and Te Tiriti partnership** providing clear opportunities for involvement in decision-making, oversight, and strategic direction.
- **Statutory boards, co-governance arrangements, and other settlement-derived mechanisms are preserved or provided for through equivalent arrangements** including Te Upoko Taiao and the Wairarapa Moana Statutory Board derived from existing Treaty settlements.
- **Future arrangements balance regional coordination with iwi and hapū authority** ensuring local relationships, representation, and place-based responsibilities remain visible and effective within any larger structure.
- **The future model remains capable of accommodating future settlements and protecting the interests of unsettled iwi** recognising that transition is part of a longer-term reform journey.

These obligations are set out in Technical Appendix 2.

Developing a partnership transition plan

The Head Start guidance requires Councils to propose a plan for working with affected PSGEs on how existing Treaty settlement arrangements can be given equivalent effect in the new Unitary Authority. A key focus will be a partnership transition plan with mana whenua that identifies how existing settlement commitments are protected, strengthened, and carried forward. Councils and mana whenua of the region have put in place a mechanism to support this work. It will also need to balance regional coordination with the protection of iwi and hapū authority, ensuring future arrangements continue to support meaningful participation, decision-making influence, and place-based relationships across the region.

Specific mechanisms will be provided for

Councils have confirmed they will provide for two key mechanisms to support Treaty obligations, with the detailed design to be developed with iwi in the next phase of work. These mechanisms would be provided for in the establishing legislation, consistent with the direction of the System Improvements reforms:

- **Māori wards** within the representative model, with a specific focus on mātāwaka and general Māori voice.
- **A Mana Whenua Governance Forum** being an appointed mana whenua body built on the model established through the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 and adapted to this region's Treaty settlement arrangements. The Forum would provide for mana whenua participation in decision-making consistent with Treaty settlement obligations and existing mechanisms.

The establishing legislation would also include a consequential amendments schedule to ensure existing Treaty settlement arrangements that reference the Wellington Regional Council continue to have equivalent effect under the new structure. This would include, among other provisions, those relating to Te Upoko Taiao, the Wairarapa Moana Statutory Board, and the Whitireia Park Board.

The way forward

See Technical Appendix 1 for more detail

The transition can be delivered by the 2028 elections, but we need the Government's support

Our high-level implementation plan demonstrates that the transition is achievable

Delivering the proposed model in time for the 2028 local body elections will require a significant programme of work across multiple councils. Participating councils have developed a high-level implementation plan to demonstrate that the transition is achievable and to provide confidence that the new arrangements can be established within the proposed timeframe.

A critical dependency is the passage of enabling legislation by the end of 2027. This will provide the mandate and certainty needed to commence key transition activities, establish new governance and operating arrangements, and prepare for implementation by the 2028 election. Any delay to legislative timeframes would increase delivery risk and require the indicative timeline to be revisited.

The timeline on the following page outlines the key workstreams, milestones and decision points that would need to progress in parallel, together with indicative timing. Further detail on deliverability, including transition principles and key risks are set out in Technical Appendix 1.

We need Government's support for the transition

- **Provide a clear transition pathway** by passing enabling legislation with proper safeguards that includes establishment arrangements, transition outcomes, and mana whenua representation arrangements. A detailed list of potential legislative amendments to support this proposal is set out in Technical Appendix 1.
- **Align local government, spatial planning and environmental reform programmes** to avoid competing change processes and enable a smoother transition pathway.
- **Streamline 2027 Long-Term Plan requirements** so councils can complete core planning and financial strategies without undertaking a full review that may be superseded by a new entity.
- **Provide financial assistance for transition and establishment to support implementation of an approved Head Start proposal**
- **Pause Long-Term Plan Audit requirements to lower costs**
- **Establish rates glidepaths and a clear timeframe** to reach any designated rates cap so that transition costs and service harmonisation can be managed without creating abrupt impacts on communities.
- **Provide support to deliver the 2028 elections** through the Electoral Commission to support the establishment of new electoral arrangements and public education.
- **Pause statutory representation reviews** until final proposals have been confirmed. Any new structure will presuppose new representation processes and make any current reviews that would normally be undertaken before the 2028 elections redundant.
- **Create mechanisms for joint Crown-local governance and investment in regional transport infrastructure** to enable coordinated planning, funding and delivery across rail, public transport, state highways and local roads.

There is also an opportunity for a future Regional Deal

We seek Government's agreement in principle to proceed with detailed planning for a future Regional Deal. Successful establishment of the new entity would create a platform for central and local government to better align planning, investment and delivery across the region. By bringing together regional spatial planning and infrastructure investment within a single organisation, the region would be better positioned to support:

- Integrated transport networks and major infrastructure projects
- Housing growth and spatial development
- Economic development, innovation, science and education
- Capital city revitalisation, civic facilities and major events planning

Strong transition governance will be critical to successful implementation

Lessons from Auckland indicate that successful transitions depend as much on implementation and governance arrangements as they do on the final operating model. Strong leadership, clear decision-making authority, dedicated transition capability, and disciplined programme management all play a critical role in maintaining momentum and managing complexity. Poorly defined governance arrangements can create uncertainty, duplication and delays, while clear governance structures can provide focus, pace and confidence.

The governance arrangements established for transition will play a significant role in determining how effectively implementation can be led, coordinated and delivered. Governance arrangements need to provide clear accountability, timely decision-making, effective coordination across participating councils, and confidence that implementation remains aligned with the agreed transition principles.

Mayoral Forum to oversee proposal and Government decision making phase

We recommend that the Mayoral Forum continues to provide governance through these phases to support engagement with central government, including whether the proposal is accepted.

Establishment phase

Once a proposal is accepted, a new model of oversight and governance would be required.

Bespoke enabling legislation

The Wellington – Wairarapa establishment approach will require bespoke enabling legislation. The reorganisation provisions of the current Local Government Act are not designed to stand up a Unitary council of this scale on a fixed timetable, and the Auckland precedent shows that a dedicated establishment statute, paired with transitional provisions, is the more reliable vehicle.

Drawing on the Auckland model

That precedent should be drawn on deliberately rather than replicated wholesale. Auckland demonstrated the value of a transition body able to make binding decisions that predecessor councils must give effect to, while also exposing the risk of settling consequential structural choices through an appointed agency before the elected body takes office.

Elected member oversight and independence

The legislation will need a clear approach to elected member oversight, defining where the transition body's mandate ends and the incoming council's begins, and how sitting councillors discharge their winding-down role. A degree of independence for the transition body is likely to be necessary to manage coordination and capture risks, particularly for decisions taken during the transition period ahead of the 2028 election, when no electoral mandate for the new council yet exists.

Decision-making limits and major transactions

That independence must be bounded. The statute should specify the limits of the transition body's decision-making authority and that there needs to be discipline on the decision-making rights on unelected officials.

The transition must also impose clear rules across all participating councils governing major transactions during transition: significant new commitments, borrowing, and material asset decisions should require sign-off so that no legacy council can prejudice the successor entity in a manner that disadvantages other communities or future generations. Calibrating these constraints against democratic legitimacy will be the central design judgement.

Building Community Confidence

Building and maintaining community confidence will be critical to the success of any transition. While the Head Start timeframe has limited the level of engagement possible before submission, the detailed design phase will provide an opportunity to consider how communities, mana whenua and partners are engaged as the proposal is developed further. This work will help shape the approach to implementation and support transparency throughout the transition process.

Mana whenua participation

Mana whenua have clearly signalled their desire to be an active participant in this transition and establishment phase. This should be endorsed.

We have planned for a phased transition that relies on the passage of enabling legislation

Position statements of our councils

The following statements represent the views of the four councils who are signatories to this proposal

Hutt City Council

Hutt City Council supports the establishment of a single regional unitary authority for the Wellington region provided it is underpinned by strong Community Councils with devolved powers enshrined in enabling legislation. Community Councils would reflect catchment areas. This proposal best aligns with the specified criteria in the Head Start and provides the best opportunity for the Wellington region to shape its own future governance arrangements rather than having reform imposed through a Government-led process.

Council recognises that the Wellington region faces significant long-term challenges including population growth, housing supply, transport connectivity, infrastructure investment, climate resilience, environmental stewardship and economic prosperity. Addressing these opportunities and challenges will increasingly require stronger regional coordination, planning and decision-making while maintaining meaningful local representation and community voice.

Council's support for the Head Start pathway proposal is founded on the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. local decisions where it matters most and regional decisions where regional scale adds value. Hutt City Council strongly supports governance arrangements that retain decision-making close to communities through Community Councils with elected representatives, clearly defined responsibilities, devolved funding and a meaningful role in governance, planning and service delivery. Community Councils are a fundamental component of the proposal and essential to preserving local identity, representation, accountability and community voice.

We support a model that builds in collaboration and provides strong safeguards against the dominance of any single population centre. This ensures fair representation across the region and enables all communities to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them.

Hutt City Council expects governance arrangements that include Mana Whenua at every level recognising them as Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners.

Council considers both Mana Whenua partnership arrangements and Māori representation to be fundamental elements of any future governance model and reserves the right to reconsider its participation should these arrangements materially change.

Māori representation must be fully provided for by enshrining Māori wards within the governance structure to provide for Māori representation including mātāwaka.

We held at the heart of our decision-making the words of Mana Whenua - "This is not a restructure of councils. It is a rare chance to build something new, and to build it well. The decisions in front of us are mokopuna decisions. The people who will live longest inside what we choose are not yet in any of our rooms, and they will not ask which council held which preference in 2026. They will ask whether we built them a region that works: a whare they can afford, wai they can swim in, whenua that is cared for, and a partnership that endures. If we make our choices with their faces before us, the politics of the moment get smaller and the work gets clearer."

The following statements represent the views of the four councils who are signatories to this proposal

Porirua City Council

poriruacity

Porirua City Council supports establishment of a single regional unitary council for the Wellington region because it is the governance model best able to deliver long-term, affordable and sustainable services and outcomes for the communities, businesses and the environment of Porirua City and the wider region. The social, economic and environmental opportunities and challenges our city and region will face in the future (including the impacts of climate change), will require us to operate at an integrated, regional scale, and to strengthen the voice and participation of our local communities.

We are committed to working in partnership with mana whenua, our communities, other councils and the Government in the detailed design phase of Head Start. We seek a governance model for our region that includes mana whenua partnership arrangements at governance level that recognise iwi as Te Tiriti partners, has Māori wards at all levels (to support mātāwaka representation), and ensures diverse voices from across Porirua City and the region are present in all bodies where decision are made, including the Unitary Governing Body and Community Councils. We strongly support inclusion of new participative democratic processes, such as citizens assemblies, in the governance model for the region, to further strengthen the voices of diverse communities of interest. We expect that the governing body of the unitary authority will be genuinely democratic and proportional to the population it represents, and to that end we consider that the proposed community council chairs should represent communities of similar size to ensure the proportionality of community council chairs on the unitary body is maintained. Porirua City Council supports a referendum prior to the detailed design being submitted to Cabinet.

The following statements represent the views of the four councils who are signatories to this proposal

South Wairarapa District Council

SOUTH WAIRARAPA DISTRICT COUNCIL
Kia Reretahi Tātau

South Wairarapa Council supports a region-wide unitary authority including all the councils of the current Greater Wellington region. We have considered the alternatives in the context of the Government's criteria and believe this is the best model for the future of our district and region, creating a stronger, more capable and sustainable form of regional and local government than other models and enabling a better response to future economic and environmental challenges.

Any future governance model needs to provide a structure that supports the different strengths of different areas and delivers more than the sum of the current parts.

Specifically, our Council's consideration of potential models focused substantially on two issues. First, continued affordable provision of essential services, especially the current regional council functions. Second, the concept of subsidiarity, which requires decisions to be made as close as possible to the people they effect, rather than always by a central authority.

The current proposal, with Community Councils making devolved decisions, delivers these requirements and we would not want to see these principles diluted in future iterations. We would also favour a mechanism ensuring that in regional decisions with significant, long-term consequences the interests of smaller communities and rural areas have some protection.

South Wairarapa currently has a Māori Ward and has close working relationships with Mana Whenua of the rohe. These arrangements need to be reflected in the new model.

The following statements represent the views of the four councils who are signatories to this proposal

Wellington City Council

Absolutely Positively **Wellington** City Council

Me Heke Ki Pōneke

Wellington City Council supports progressing a Head Start proposal for the Wellington region and working collaboratively with mana whenua, communities, other councils and the Government through any detailed design phase. Initial community engagement undertaken across the region and in Wellington city identified greater support for a metropolitan unitary authority model alongside a Wairarapa unitary authority.

We note that South Wairarapa District Council has voted to support joining a single regional unitary authority.

From information provided to mayors and councils, we have to reconcile the significant climate resilience, infrastructure and environmental challenges facing the wider region and acknowledge that, when assessed against the Government's Head Start criteria, there is both a case for a single regional unitary authority or two regional unitary authorities that can support integrated planning, service delivery and long-term financial sustainability across the Wellington-Wairarapa region. Wellington City Council's preference is for two unitary authorities for the region.

We recognise that potential regional and sub-regional governance arrangements were developed within the timeframes available for preparation of a high-level Head Start proposal and that further work will be required during the detailed design phase to determine the most appropriate representation, governance and decision-making arrangements. Those arrangements acknowledge different parts of the region have a different nature and character to others. Now that there is greater certainty regarding participation in the Head Start process, the detailed design phase will provide the opportunity to fully assess and develop regional and sub-regional governance arrangements, including how local communities are represented and engaged in future decision-making.

We seek a detailed design phase that further develops representation arrangements, mana whenua partnership arrangements, and a programme of community engagement and consultation, including a referendum before a final proposal is submitted to Cabinet.

Greater Wellington Regional Council

While regional councils were excluded from submitting under the Head Start Pathway, Greater Wellington Regional Council participated in discussions and was a member of the Mayoral Forum and associated working groups in the Wellington Region.

Greater Wellington Regional Council intends to submit a separate letter of support to Government.

The following statements represent the views of other councils in the region

Kāpiti Coast District Council

Kāpiti Coast District Council does not support the proposed single Unitary Authority model for the Wellington region. Council considers that a sub-regional Unitary Authority model is more appropriate to reflect communities of interest, local identity and decision making, and the feedback received from our community.

Council requests that the Head Start Pathway Proposal be amended to replace the proposed single Wellington-wide Unitary Authority with a sub-regional Unitary Authority model, including a North-Western Unitary Authority incorporating Kāpiti Coast District. The model may comprise two to three unitary authorities across the wider Wellington-Wairarapa region, reflecting communities of interest and the preferences of participating councils and communities. Kāpiti Coast District Council would support the Head Start Pathway Proposal if provision is made for a North-Western Unitary Authority within the overall regional proposal.

Council acknowledges that the governance arrangements for other parts of the region, including the Wellington metropolitan area and Wairarapa, are matters for those councils and communities to determine. We respect the ability of each sub-region to adopt governance structures that best reflect local circumstances and aspirations.

Council does not support the use of community councils within a North-Western Unitary Authority and considers that a directly elected unitary authority would provide stronger local accountability and decision-making. However, Council acknowledges that other sub-regions may determine community councils are appropriate within their own governance arrangements.

Council supports the transfer of regional council functions into future unitary authorities and recognises that further detailed design work is required to determine how those functions are delivered, governed, and shared across the region to achieve efficiency, resilience, and value for communities.

Council also considers the proposed timeframe for detailed design to be highly compressed and insufficient. Time should be allowed for robust analysis, modelling, governance design, community consultation and transition planning to ensure successful implementation.

The following statements represent the views of other councils in the region

Upper Hutt City Council

Te Kaunihera o
Te Awa Kairangi ki Uta
Upper Hutt City Council

At its meeting on 5 August 2026, Upper Hutt City Council resolved not to agree to submit a proposal to the Head Start process and did not approve Upper Hutt City Council's participation in, or the inclusion of Upper Hutt City within, the Wellington Region Head Start Proposal.

Council requests that any Wellington Region Head Start Proposal submitted through the regional process include only those territorial authorities whose councils have formally resolved to approve the proposal, and that no council or district that has resolved not to approve the proposal be included.

However if Upper Hutt City is identified as directly affected in any submitted proposal, that inclusion must not be represented as approval of, or participation in, the proposal by Upper Hutt City Council. Upper Hutt City Council requests that no alternative reorganisation model be attributed to Upper Hutt City Council unless it has been formally considered and approved by the Council.

Upper Hutt's relationships with neighbouring councils, Greater Wellington Regional Council, mana whenua, Central Government and the wider region remain essential.

This Council decision is solely about participation in the Head Start process and this particular proposal, not the value of those relationships or our commitment to continuing constructive regional collaboration.

As consistently stated during the regional Head Start process, Upper Hutt City Council remains willing to work collaboratively with other councils on regional and subregional matters, including shared-service opportunities.

The following statements represent the views of other councils in the region

MASTERTON WHAKAORIORI DISTRICT COUNCIL

Te Kaunihera-ā-Rohe o Taratahi CARTERTON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Joint Position Statement

Wairarapa Unitary Head Start Proposal

Masterton and Carterton District Councils have resolved to submit a stand-alone Wairarapa unitary authority Head Start proposal. Additionally, Masterton and Carterton District Councils have resolved not to participate in a single Wellington-Wairarapa unitary authority Head Start proposal.

Our council resolutions are supported by the majority of respondents to community surveys on amalgamation across the Wairarapa over the past three months. We acknowledge South Wairarapa District Council holds a different view.

Wairarapa's primary production, natural environment, interconnected catchments, network of rivers and diverse populations are spread from the Tararua Ranges to the Pacific coast. Making up almost 73% of the land area in the greater Wellington region, Wairarapa is unique. We believe a Wairarapa unitary authority is best placed to manage these unique challenges.

Furthermore, the upcoming transfer of drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services to Waitī Waters has highlighted our existing structures of local government are no longer fit for purpose.

Our communities and our councils strongly believe the issues facing Wairarapa, both now and in the future, are best addressed through the formation of a single Wairarapa unitary authority.

Bex Johnson
Mayor
Masterton District Council

Steve Cretney
Mayor
Carterton District Council

Technical Appendix 1

Assessment against the Government criteria

Supports the new planning system

Shows clear support for implementing the new planning system – including progress on spatial and natural environment plan development – and avoids or minimises disruption to that work.

The proposal meets the Government's criteria to support the new planning system

An integrated regional planning system, shaped locally through community and catchment perspectives

Regional direction sets an integrated planning framework

Under the proposed model, spatial planning, land use planning and environmental planning operate as an integrated system, delivered through the Unitary Authority and informed by Community Councils.

At the regional level, the Unitary Authority is responsible for setting direction, making trade-offs, and maintaining a coherent planning framework for the region. This includes preparing the Regional Spatial Plan, which establishes the long-term spatial strategy for growth, infrastructure sequencing, environmental limits and key constraints. The land use and natural environment plans are prepared to ensure that spatial direction is translated into consistent zoning, rules and regulatory provisions across the region.

Community Councils connect catchments and communities to planning decisions

Spatial planning within this system is explicitly informed by a catchment-based approach, recognising that natural systems such as water, hazards and ecosystems operate across administrative boundaries. The Regional Spatial Plan applies this catchment lens to spatial strategy, shaping where growth occurs, how infrastructure is sequenced, and how environmental limits are applied across the region.

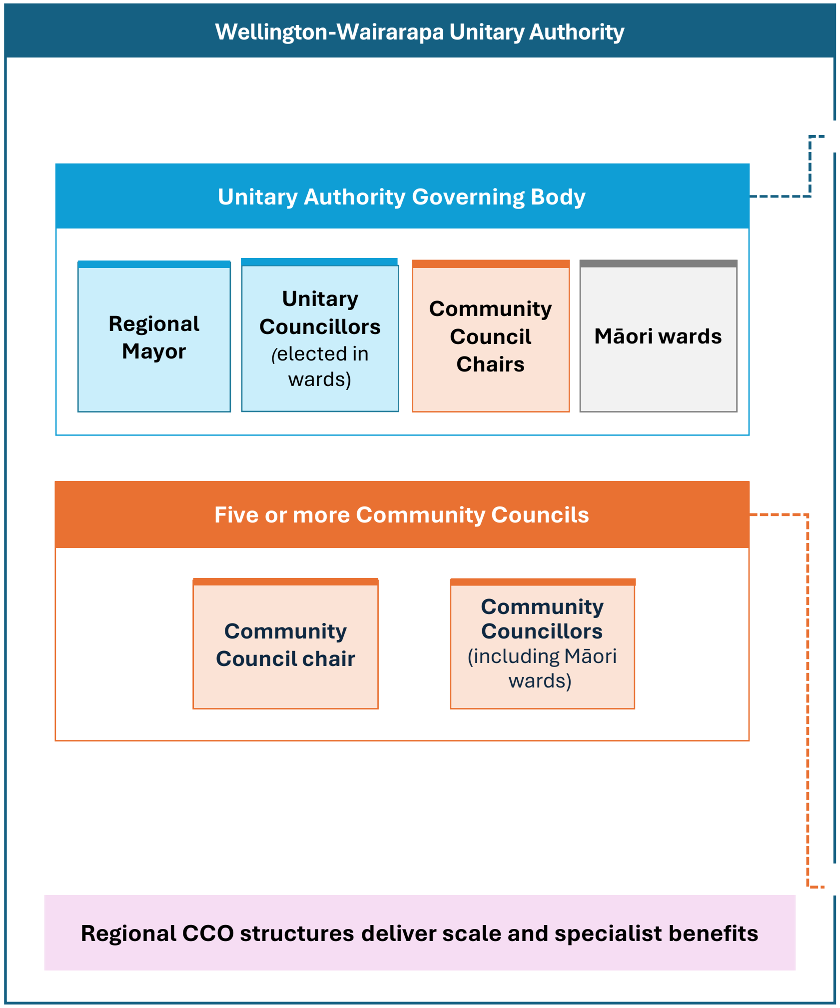
Community Councils are the primary mechanism through which the catchment-based approach is applied in practice. Their geography and roles enable them to reflect both communities of interest and the characteristics of local catchments. They provide structured input into spatial planning priorities, local growth patterns, environmental management priorities and resilience responses, grounded in an understanding of how catchments function within their areas. In doing so, Community Councils ensure that catchment dynamics and local conditions directly inform regional spatial planning and plan development, without requiring separate catchment governance structures.

One system from strategy to delivery, with clear roles and accountability

Environmental planning operates through the same integrated model. The Unitary Authority sets region-wide environmental outcomes, limits and regulatory framework (including freshwater, natural hazards, coastal management and climate response) while Community Councils help shape how these are interpreted and applied locally, informed by catchment conditions and community priorities. This ensures environmental management reflects the realities of natural systems while maintaining consistency across the region.

Overall, the model establishes a unified planning system with a clear line of sight from strategy to delivery, where a catchment-based approach is embedded throughout. The Unitary Council sets regional direction and ensures integration across spatial, land use and environmental planning. Community Councils operationalise the catchment lens by providing place-based and catchment-informed input, ensuring that planning outcomes are both regionally coordinated and responsive to how natural systems and communities function on the ground.

How the planning functions across the model



The Unitary Authority has **overall responsibility for the planning system** and is the **owner of the Regional combined plan,** ensuring a coherent and integrated framework across the region.

The Unitary Authority **prepares and adopts the regional spatial plan as one integrated framework**, and makes region-wide decisions to align growth, infrastructure and environmental outcomes.

Community Councils are responsible for **informing local network, community and catchment priorities within the planning system,** reflecting place-based needs, environmental conditions and community aspirations.

Land Use Plans and Natural Environment plans are required to implement the Regional Spatial Plan. Community Councils will help identify **community-scale development priorities, environmental outcomes and place-based responses**, and support with implementation.

The proposal will support the reform of planning system in Wellington and the Wairarapa

An integrated planning system that provides certainty and simplifies delivery

Bringing responsibility for spatial planning, transport, infrastructure, environmental management, and long term financial planning together creates a fundamentally more coherent planning system. Instead of fragmented plans and investment decisions across multiple councils, the region would operate under a integrated framework that sets clear direction for growth and development. This enables a unified regional growth strategy that aligns land use, infrastructure, and environmental outcomes.

The primary benefit of this approach is clarity and certainty for system users. Developers, infrastructure providers, iwi, and national agencies would operate within one consistent set of rules, definitions, and expectations. This reduces the current complexity created by multiple planning systems and removes inconsistencies between metro and rural areas. Similar issues such as natural hazards, intensification, transport corridors, and infrastructure upgrades would be treated consistently across Wellington, Porirua, the Hutt Valley, Kāpiti, and Wairarapa.

A regional plan also strengthens the link between growth and infrastructure capacity. Growth decisions can be aligned with the availability of critical infrastructure such as water networks, rather than responding to constraints after they emerge. This provides a more predictable pathway for development and supports better sequencing of investment. It also reduces duplication across plan reviews, freshwater planning, climate adaptation work, and growth strategies, improving efficiency across the system.

At a regional level, this integrated approach enables more effective responses to shared challenges, including harbour water quality, sedimentation, and climate resilience. By aligning land use, transport, economic development, and environmental management, the system supports more coordinated and sustainable outcomes for the region as a whole.

Clearer governance that enables faster, more consistent decisions

A streamlined governance model supports more effective and timely decision making by reducing the number of decision making layers and providing a clear regional focus. Consolidating planning responsibilities establishes clear accountability for delivering growth, infrastructure, and resilience outcomes. This contrasts with the current system where responsibilities are distributed across multiple councils, often leading to slower and less consistent decisions.

The simplification of governance arrangements improves the day to day operation of the planning system. A plan, supported by standardised rules and integrated infrastructure planning, enables faster and more predictable consenting and plan implementation decisions. System users benefit from clearer expectations and greater consistency in how policies are interpreted and applied.

The model also improves coordination with key partners. Central government, iwi, and major infrastructure providers such as Waka Kotahi, KiwiRail, water service organisations, and Kāinga Ora would have a point of engagement and a clearer long term regional signal. This improves alignment of investment decisions and provides greater stability for major infrastructure programmes.

Reducing the number of committees and political processes also simplifies engagement and decision making. Stakeholders no longer need to navigate multiple local processes, and decisions can be made at the scale that reflects the issues being addressed. This supports a more strategic approach while still allowing for local input where it is needed.

The proposal is designed to reduce disruption and uncertainty

Maintaining momentum and providing confidence through transition

The proposal is designed to maintain momentum in implementing the new planning system while reducing disruption and uncertainty. Preparatory work is already underway across the region, coordinated through the Wellington Regional Leadership Group secretariat. This work is identifying knowledge gaps, aligning approaches, and ensuring readiness to begin the formal planning processes once legislation is confirmed.

Providing a point of governance for the Regional Spatial Plan reduces fragmentation and political variability during the transition period. Instead of multiple councils progressing planning work independently, the region would have a clear decision making structure that supports consistent direction and prioritisation. This helps ensure that planning, infrastructure, and growth sequencing are aligned from the outset.

The region is already investing in spatial planning, building on the Future Development Strategy and adapting ways of working to improve integration. Ongoing engagement with tangata whenua and neighbouring areas supports alignment and shared understanding. This positions the region to transition into the new system with continuity, rather than resetting or duplicating work.

The proposal also reflects the functional reality of the region. People live and work across council boundaries, particularly along key corridors such as the western corridor. A coherent regional approach supports more effective planning for housing, transport, and employment. Reducing political change across multiple councils provides a more stable environment for long term investment and decision making.

Managing natural systems at the right scale to improve environmental outcomes

An integrated regional model strengthens the management of natural systems by aligning planning with how catchments and environmental processes operate in practice. Bringing together land use, freshwater, stormwater, and coastal planning enables a more complete and coordinated approach to environmental management.

Managing issues at a regional scale is particularly important for cross boundary challenges. Flooding, sedimentation, water quality, and coastal change do not align with council boundaries. A planning framework enables these issues to be prioritised and addressed consistently across the region, rather than being managed in separate and potentially conflicting ways.

The integration of catchment management with growth and infrastructure planning also improves outcomes. Water infrastructure constraints can be addressed alongside decisions about where and how growth occurs, rather than responding after capacity issues arise. This supports more efficient investment and ensures that environmental limits and development capacity are considered together.

The model provides an integrated planning interface while still enabling local input to reflect community characteristics and priorities. A coordinated regional approach, supported by local perspectives, improves the ability to respond to environmental challenges while maintaining the distinct attributes of different parts of the region.

Some elements need to be resolved in the detailed design phase

Transitioning to an integrated planning system is the first critical step

While the proposal establishes a clear direction for an integrated regional planning system, a number of detailed design matters will need to be worked through to support effective implementation. These relate primarily to ensuring a smooth transition from the current system, establishing clear governance and partnership arrangements, and designing the operational settings required for a coherent planning framework.

A key area of focus will be the transition pathway for existing plans and programmes. This includes district plans, regional natural resource plans, freshwater planning processes, and climate adaptation work. Decisions will be needed on how these workstreams are sequenced, combined, or progressed within the new system to avoid duplication and maintain momentum. A phased and clearly communicated transition approach will be important to ensure continuity of statutory processes while moving toward an integrated plan.

This must be supported by clear governance and roles

Governance arrangements will also require further definition, particularly in relation to strategic planning, regulatory functions, and iwi partnership roles. This includes clarifying how decision making responsibilities are allocated within the new structure and how iwi are engaged as partners in both plan development and ongoing system operation. Establishing clear and enduring governance settings will be critical to maintaining confidence and ensuring effective collaboration across the region, with work already underway start preparing a process agreement, principles and ways of working ahead of the new legislation being enacted.

Effective delivery will rely on aligned systems, structures and implementation settings.

Operational integration will also need to be addressed. This includes aligning consenting processes, digital platforms, and data standards across the region to support consistent and efficient system performance. Clarity will be needed on the future roles of existing entities, such as water service organisations, including how they operate within the new system during the transition and in the longer term.

Further consideration will be required on how potential boundary changes are managed. Any changes to boundaries would require legislative adjustments and will need to be carefully sequenced to avoid disruption to planning processes.

Finally, detailed design will need to address the development of region wide approaches to key policy areas, particularly natural hazards and coastal retreat. Establishing consistent frameworks for these issues under a unified authority will improve clarity and effectiveness, but will require detailed technical and policy work to ensure alignment with national direction and local conditions.

In some cases, legislative change may be required to support implementation. This could include adjustments to enable boundary changes, support a clean transition from existing plans to a integrated framework, and avoid the need for dual system operation. These matters can be progressed alongside detailed design work to ensure the new system can be implemented efficiently and with minimal disruption.

Simplifies local governance

Proposes more efficient regional governance arrangements, consolidating decision-making and improving alignment between a region’s councils.

The proposal meets the Government's criteria to simplify local governance

A simpler and more accountable governance model

The proposal would significantly simplify local governance across the Wellington Wairarapa region by replacing the current multi-council structure with a region-wide Unitary Authority, while retaining strong local decision-making through empowered Community Councils. Compared with the status quo, where responsibilities for transport, environmental management, infrastructure, spatial planning, economic development and local services are split across councils, the proposal brings these functions together within a Unitary Authority with clear accountability for regional outcomes.

A key strength of the proposal is the creation of a governing body led by a directly elected Regional Mayor with executive powers (with appropriate disciplines). This provides a regional voice and a point of accountability for strategic direction, investment decisions, service levels and long-term outcomes. Bringing regional and territorial functions together within one organisation removes duplication, reduces fragmented decision-making and enables competing priorities, such as housing growth, transport investment, environmental management and infrastructure provision, to be considered through a planning and investment framework. A consolidated balance sheet, integrated planning system and shared corporate services would further reduce complexity and improve organisational capability and efficiency.

Decisions are made at the appropriate level

While regional functions would be consolidated, local decision-making would remain close to communities through empowered Community Councils. Rather than acting in an advisory capacity, Community Councils would have defined responsibilities, devolved budgets and accountability for local priorities, facilities, placemaking and community development.

The model establishes a clear distinction between regional and local responsibilities. Decisions that benefit from regional scale and consistency would sit with the Unitary Authority, while decisions requiring local knowledge and community input would be delegated to Community Councils. This approach simplifies governance without reducing local influence.

The governance model is easier for communities to understand

The proposal introduces an innovative approach to local governance that goes beyond current local government arrangements. Under a dual-mandate model, Community Council Chairs would sit on both the Community Council and the Unitary Authority Governing Body. This creates a direct link between local and regional decision-making, reduces governance silos and ensures local perspectives are incorporated into regional decisions. It also creates a governance structure that is easier for communities to understand, with a clear line of accountability between regional decision-makers and local representatives.

Trade-offs and further design work

The principal trade-off associated with a simpler governance structure is the potential perception that decision-making becomes more distant from local communities. The proposal mitigates this risk through empowered Community Councils, devolved decision-making and strong local representation, including Māori wards.

Further design work will be undertaken to refine the allocation of responsibilities between the Unitary Authority and Community Councils, confirm representation arrangements, determine delegated authorities, and explore the future role of regional CCOs and other specialist delivery entities. Engagement with communities, mana whenua and stakeholders will help ensure the final model achieves the right balance between regional coordination and local voice.

Economies of scale

Supports regional strategic planning and effective delivery of key regional functions (such as transport and catchment management), and demonstrates responsible and affordable asset management, infrastructure investment, and service delivery.

The proposal meets the Government’s criteria to support economies of scale

Scale brings stronger capability and more efficient service delivery

A large Unitary Authority as proposed, is better placed to attract and retain specialist capability, invest in systems and data, and deliver services consistently across the region. Functions that benefit from scale, specialist expertise and long-term planning would be consolidated within the Unitary Authority, including transport, environmental management, regulatory services, infrastructure planning and investment, climate adaptation and economic development.

A single balance sheet, common service standards, integrated planning processes and shared corporate services would reduce duplication and improve organisational capability. The consolidation of governance, planning, finance, procurement, asset management and support services would create opportunities for efficiencies while strengthening service delivery and resilience over time.

Better management of transport, catchments and regional infrastructure

The proposal would improve the delivery of functions that require coordination beyond current council boundaries. Transport planning and investment would be considered through a regional lens, allowing land use, housing growth, public transport, state highways, local roads and major infrastructure projects to be planned together. This would create opportunities for more integrated investment decisions and stronger alignment with central government priorities.

Similarly, catchment management would benefit from a more coordinated approach. Community Councils would act as catchment-based governance bodies, helping shape local environmental priorities, freshwater management and flood resilience, while the Unitary Authority would provide region-wide coordination, investment and technical capability. This combines the benefits of regional integration with local knowledge and place-based decision-making.

Stronger financial sustainability and asset stewardship

The proposal would improve the region's ability to manage major infrastructure assets and respond to long-term challenges. A larger rating base, consolidated balance sheet and broader revenue base would strengthen financial resilience and borrowing capacity, enabling more strategic investment decisions and greater flexibility in managing future infrastructure needs.

Bringing infrastructure planning, asset management and investment decisions together within a Unitary Authority would support more consistent asset stewardship, prioritisation of investment and long-term financial planning. It would also provide a stronger platform for managing growth, climate adaptation and infrastructure renewal across the region.

Supporting innovation, growth and regional prosperity

A large region-wide Unitary Authority would be better positioned to pursue economic development opportunities, partner with central government and attract investment. The proposal creates a platform for a future Regional Deal, allowing central and local government to align planning and investment across transport, housing, infrastructure, economic development and capital city revitalisation. The combination of greater scale, stronger capability and integrated planning would improve the region's ability to innovate, respond to emerging challenges and support long-term economic growth and prosperity.

Trade-offs and further design work required

The principal trade-off associated with greater scale is the risk that service delivery becomes less responsive to local needs. The proposal mitigates this risk by including empowered Community Councils with devolved responsibilities and funding, ensuring local priorities continue to inform decisions and service delivery.

Further work will be undertaken during detailed design to quantify potential efficiency gains, assess financial impacts, confirm future arrangements for regional CCOs and specialist delivery vehicles, and refine the allocation of responsibilities between regional and local governance.

Summary of key findings from independent Financial Sustainability Report

Current context and outlook

The Head Start process requires councils to assess their current governance and service delivery arrangements and demonstrate responsible and affordable asset management, infrastructure investment, and service delivery.

Collectively, the councils of the Wellington/Wairarapa Region face significant financial headwinds, including rising input costs, high asset replacement costs, significant demands on investment, deteriorating operating budgets, and increasing debt servicing costs. These headwinds translate into increasing pressure on rates and worsening affordability.

Looking ahead, these pressures are forecast to continue, with councils' current projections indicating that, collectively, they expect rates revenue per rating unit to increase by an average of 5.7% per annum, with rates as a share of total revenue increasing from 49% to 62% over the next 10 years.

Councils also face significant exposure to risk from natural hazards, extreme weather and asset failure. Our analysis indicates several smaller councils, and the most indebted councils, are vulnerable to even moderately sized shocks.

Under a conservatively assumed $50 - $150 million shock, and in the absence of central government support, some councils would exceed their borrowing limits and/or exhaust their remaining borrowing headroom, while larger councils would face significantly diminished financial capacity. Of relevance to the amalgamation options under consideration, borrowing capacity is not always located where risk is concentrated.

Financial assessment of options

The amalgamation options under consideration have a range of potential financial benefits and costs that vary across the different configurations. The key findings of our assessment include:

- **Amalgamation options offer the potential for savings net of transition costs** - All amalgamation options have the potential to be net beneficial, but the extent of benefits varies with the scale and complexity of the option and depend on the assumptions made. On a per rating unit basis, the present value of net savings over 25 years falls within a narrow range of $3,900 to $4,500 across the options.
- **The potential loss of intraregional subsidies could offset any savings benefits for Wairarapa ratepayers** - Within the region, there are apparent mismatches between the amount of regional council rates revenue collected from Wairarapa ratepayers, and the regional council's estimated cost of delivering activities within those areas. This mismatch is most significant for Wairarapa. Even after reducing the level of regional costs and increasing the share of Centreport dividends allocated to Wairarapa, a significant funding gap remains.
- **While a Wairarapa Unitary Authority would have choices about how to close that gap, it is plausible that rates revenue would need to increase to balance the budget**. A future Wairarapa authority would need to weigh its options carefully, including considering changes to levels of service, finding greater savings, and/or increasing revenue. Given the size of the funding gap, an increase in rates could outweigh any amalgamation-related savings under stand-alone configurations.
- **Amalgamation offers significant scope to increase financial resilience and reduce vulnerability to shocks.** This is probably the most certain financial benefit from amalgamation, with balance sheet consolidation relieving borrowing constraints for smaller councils and councils with higher levels of indebtedness. Given the significant risk profile across the region, amalgamation offers greater financial resilience through diversification of risk across geographies. These benefits are dependent on an amalgamated authority using this greater flexibility wisely.
- Our analysis indicates **all amalgamation options could absorb a significant shock while remaining within their LGFA debt limits and retaining borrowing headroom.** This indicates a significantly greater capacity to absorb unplanned costs relative to the status quo.
- **The largest configurations offer the greatest financial resilience benefits.** Under a $150 million shock, the Single Regional Unitary Authority and Western Area Unitary Authority configurations retain approximately $2.1-$2.6 billion of borrowing headroom, compared with $103-$208 million for the North Western and Wairarapa unitary configurations. A shock of this size would represent a much smaller share of annual revenue for the larger Unitary Authority options (around 6–7%) than for the Wairarapa (77%) or North Western (41%) unitary options.

Maintains local voice

Demonstrates fair and effective representation for communities of interest and how decisions will be made at the local level, balancing urban and rural interests.

The proposal meets the Government's criteria to maintain the local voice

Local voice is both a regional objective and a design principle

Maintaining local voice was a core consideration throughout the development of the proposal. Within the reform framework, it was identified both as a regional objective through the goal of effective local representation, and as a design principle through the commitment to local voice and democratic legitimacy. Together, these principles helped shape the assessment of options and informed the selection of the preferred model.

Under the proposed model, regional functions would be consolidated within a single Unitary Authority, while communities would continue to have meaningful influence over decisions that affect their places, priorities and identity. The model is founded on the principle of subsidiarity, with decisions made at the lowest appropriate level and only lifted to the regional tier where there is a clear benefit from scale, consistency or regional coordination. This approach recognises that strong regional leadership and effective local representation are complementary objectives that must be designed together, rather than treated as competing priorities.

Representation arrangements support communities of interest

The proposed representation model combines regional leadership with strong local representation. The Regional Mayor would be elected at large across the region and supported by a Unitary Authority Governing Body comprising Unitary Councillors and Community Council Chairs. Unitary Councillors would be elected from wards aligned with Community Council areas, while Community Council Chairs would be elected at large from within their respective communities. Final ward arrangements and representation ratios would be confirmed during detailed design following further community and mana whenua engagement.

The model has been informed by analysis of communities of interest and recognises that Wellington and Wairarapa contain distinct urban, suburban, coastal and rural communities whose identities do not always align neatly with existing council boundaries.

The proposed Community Council areas: Wairarapa, Kāpiti, North Wellington/Porirua, Hutt Valley/Te Awakairangi and Central Wellington/Pōneke reflect communities of interest and provide a practical geography for place-based planning and decision-making. Their boundaries recognise the transport, housing, employment and environmental connections that shape how communities function in practice, while also aligning with the catchments and natural systems that underpin spatial planning, freshwater management and climate resilience.

Community Councils are proposed at a catchment scale because this is the scale at which many kaitiakitanga, statutory acknowledgements, and existing freshwater and harbour co-governance arrangements already operate.

The proposal ensures local and regional decision-making remain connected and strengthens Te Tiriti partnership arrangements

Community Councils provide meaningful local decision-making

Community Councils would form an integral part of the governance structure rather than acting in an advisory capacity. They would comprise elected members and a Chair and be supported by clearly defined responsibilities, delegated decision-making powers and devolved funding. This would enable communities to continue influencing decisions relating to local facilities, placemaking, community development, local events, grants, local transport priorities and other place-based services.

The functional analysis undertaken as part of the proposal demonstrates a deliberate allocation of responsibilities between regional and local governance. Functions that depend on local knowledge, community relationships and local priorities would sit with Community Councils, while functions requiring regional scale and consistency would sit with the Unitary Authority. This approach maintains local responsiveness while avoiding duplication and fragmentation.

Local and regional decision-making remain connected

The proposal introduces an innovative dual-mandate model to ensure local perspectives remain visible within regional decision-making. Community Council Chairs would sit on both the Community Council and the Authority Governing Body, providing a direct link between local and regional governance. This arrangement strengthens accountability, reduces governance silos and creates a clearer pathway for community priorities to influence regional decisions. It also avoids the creation of additional governance layers by embedding local representation directly within the wider governance structure.

Māori participation and partnership arrangements are strengthened

The proposal provides multiple mechanisms to support Māori participation in local government decision-making. Community Councils would include Māori wards as part of the representative structure, ensuring Māori communities have direct representation within local governance arrangements. Councils will also explore a statutory Mana Whenua Governance Forum to provide mana whenua participation in governance and strategic decision-making, building on existing regional arrangements.

Beyond representation, the proposal seeks to maintain and strengthen existing relationships, Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements, governance arrangements and other mechanisms that support iwi and hapū participation in decision-making.

Community Councils would also play an important role in catchment-based planning and environmental governance, creating opportunities for local and mana whenua perspectives to inform environmental management, freshwater planning and resilience planning.

Further design work is required

Detailed design work will be required to finalise ward boundaries, representation ratios, Māori representation arrangements, Community Council powers and delegations, and the relationship between Community Councils and any future regional CCOs.

Further engagement with communities, mana whenua and stakeholders will help refine these arrangements and ensure the final model delivers fair and effective representation for communities of interest across the region.

Functional analysis

Our functional analysis informed the design of the proposed governance model and the allocation of responsibilities between the Unitary Authority and Community Councils.

We undertook a functional analysis to determine which functions are best delivered regionally or locally

A region-wide Unitary Authority would bring together the scale, capability and strategic focus needed to address regional challenges, while ensuring communities continue to shape local priorities, services and place-based delivery.

A region-wide Unitary Authority would combine the benefits of regional scale with the responsiveness and local knowledge that communities value. Under this model, functions that benefit from consistency, specialist capability, long-term planning and purchasing power would be brought together into a regional body.

Strategic planning, infrastructure investment, financial management, regulatory services, environmental management, transport, waste, and major community facilities would operate through one organisation with a balance sheet, consistent service standards, and clear accountability. This would be complemented by greater alignment of core corporate and support functions, including areas such as legal, communications, human resources, information technology and procurement.

This aims to strengthen capability, improve efficiency and provide a stronger platform to plan and invest for the region's long-term growth, resilience and prosperity.

For functions such as environmental management and spatial planning, sub-regional and catchment-based arrangements would ensure decisions reflect local conditions while remaining part of a coordinated regional approach.

At the same time, the model recognises that communities are different and that decisions are often best informed by local knowledge and priorities.

Community Councils would play a significant role in shaping local priorities, influencing regional decisions where appropriate, allocating devolved funding, and overseeing the local delivery of services.

They would help determine local placemaking, parks and facilities investment, community development initiatives, and local economic priorities. They would also play a key role in the deployment of regional services within their communities.

The result is a council that is unified where scale matters, but locally responsive where community voice, local relationships and place-based delivery are critical to achieving better outcomes.

These functions would be supported by a council organisation, making the Unitary Authority a significant employer in the region. This would create a depth of capacity and capability and strong career pathways for staff. Arrangements would be put in place in a future operating model to ensure a strong local presence in communities was retained.

Indicative allocation of governance and strategy functions

FUNCTION	COMMUNITY LEVEL	REGIONAL LEVEL
GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY		
Strategy, planning and finance	Local and community priorities feed into the long-term plan and financial strategy that supports it. Allocate a local share of discretionary capital and operating budgets invested in local communities, and trade-offs between local projects within an allocated envelope.	The long-term plan and overall financial strategy, region-wide infrastructure strategy, the revenue and financing policy, treasury, borrowing and the consolidated balance sheet, group-wide asset management, and the rating framework and rates harmonisation pathway.
Representation and engagement	Local or community plans and agreements, local engagement, and advocacy to the governing body on behalf of the community.	The overall governance and committee structure, region-wide consultation, and the representation review framework.
Emergency management	Local response delivery arrangements, community resilience initiatives, local welfare and recovery priorities.	The group plan, coordination, and region-wide readiness and response capability.
Regulatory functions	Local bylaw provisions where local conditions justify variation, local enforcement priorities (such as dog control or freedom camping), and the local deployment for services.	A regional building consent system. Other systems like environmental health, alcohol licensing administration, animal control, and the bylaw framework run as consistent region-wide system. While services are deployed locally, they also maintain a point of accountability, consistent standards, capability, and fairness across the region.

Indicative allocation of planning and environment functions

FUNCTION	COMMUNITY LEVEL	REGIONAL LEVEL
PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT		
Spatial planning	Spatial planning input aligned to planning system reforms. Government planning system changes will require a clear sub-regional/catchment-based approach within a regional planning system.	Regional spatial planning, future development strategy functions, urban growth planning, housing and business land capacity, strategic infrastructure sequencing, region-wide planning frameworks and zoning approaches, structure planning, and the preparation and administration of planning instruments. Sub-regional or catchment standing committees could operate with delegation.
Natural resource management and environmental regulation	Local input into catchment priorities and works programme, and local advocacy on environmental outcomes that matter to a community. Sub-regional or catchment approach will be likely be required for environmental management (for example pest/predator, coastal, flood management).	A whole-of-region function: the regional policy statement, regional plans, freshwater allocation and quality, air quality, coastal management, soil conservation, flood protection and river control, biosecurity and pest management, consenting and compliance for regional matters. Sub-regional or catchment standing committees will inform the regional approach.
Climate change response	Local climate adaptation priorities, community resilience initiatives, and local input on the impacts of climate risks and transition planning.	A single region-wide climate change and natural hazard response framework, including emissions reduction and adaptation strategies, climate risk assessment, resilience planning, funding and investment decisions, monitoring and reporting, and coordination of responses to significant climate impacts and natural hazards across the region.

Indicative allocation of community and local services functions

FUNCTION	COMMUNITY LEVEL	REGIONAL LEVEL
COMMUNITY AND LOCAL SERVICES		
Parks, reserves and open space	Invest in local parks, reserves and playgrounds, local service levels and renewals, naming, and local placemaking and amenity choices in line with devolved funding arrangements. Funding provided through a clear devolved budget envelope.	Plan for regional parks, major sportsgrounds and destination facilities, and network-wide open space strategy, investment plan and standards.
Community facilities and services	Invest to meet local facility service levels, hours and programming, local hall and venue management, and which local facilities to invest in or divest within a devolved budget.	Network strategy and standards for libraries, pools, recreation and community facilities, including minimum service standards and equitable access across the region; shared back-office functions and procurement; a employer model; and decisions on major or region-serving facilities.
Waste management	Local waste minimisation initiatives, community education programmes, local input on service needs and facility provision, and the local deployment of waste and recycling services.	Waste management and minimisation planning, waste collection and recycling services, resource recovery, processing and disposal services, infrastructure planning and investment, procurement and contracting, and service standards delivered through a consistent regional system. While services are deployed locally, they maintain consistent standards, capability, efficiency and accountability across the region.

Indicative allocation of economy and people functions

FUNCTION	COMMUNITY LEVEL	REGIONAL LEVEL
ECONOMY AND PEOPLE		
Economic and community development	Invest in local economic and town-centre initiatives, local events, grants, community development priorities, and local identity and promotion, while informing and influencing regional economic development priorities. Funding provided through a clear devolved budget envelope. The needs of the rural and urban communities need to be reflected direction in any regional wide approach.	A stronger, region-wide approach to economic growth and development is needed, supported by a clear regional economic development framework that balances the distinct opportunities and needs of both urban and rural communities. This should focus on lifting productivity across key sectors, including services, technology, manufacturing, and the primary industries, while fostering innovation, business growth, investment (including partnerships with iwi investors), and talent attraction. It should also promote a coordinated regional tourism offer and lead major sector development, precinct, and economic transformation initiatives. This could be explored as a CCO as part of the next phase.
Transport	Local road amenity levels, local street upgrades and streetscape, traffic calming, local parking management, and prioritisation of the local works programme, reflect local conditions and community priorities.	A significant improvement in region-wide transport investment and service delivery is needed, underpinned by strong alignment with the region’s spatial planning framework. This should be delivered through a regional transport system responsible for strategic and arterial networks, public transport, network-wide standards and policies, regional transport planning, and major capital investments, while ensuring services are delivered locally to reflect community needs and priorities. A public transport CCO could be explored as part of the next phase.

Deliverability

Proposals are realistic and demonstrate how new arrangements can be implemented in a timely manner.

The transition will require a strong working relationship between Councils and Government

To support the transition, we developed an agreed set of transition principles and guardrails

TRANSITION PRINCIPLES:

What the transition needs to achieve

1 Maintain service continuity and reliability for communities

Maintain reliable services through the transition by preserving relationships, knowledge and capability.

2 Clear accountabilities and decision-making authority

Decision-makers should have sufficient authority to deliver a successful transition.

3 Provide flexibility to adapt over time

Enable decision-makers to respond to changing circumstances and lessons learned during implementation.

4 Uphold partnership with mana whenua

Ensure continuity of Treaty obligations and partnership arrangements

5 Build on existing strengths and capability

Draw on existing people, systems and knowledge to be ready from day one and drive transformation over time.

GUARDRAILS TO MANAGE THE FINANCIAL TRANSITION:

Guardrails seek to balance fairness, a smooth transition and financial efficiency

1. **Fair approach to the financial transition:** In the future, charges faced by communities should rest on fair services and charges, adjusted only for genuine differences in the cost to serve, not on legacy council boundaries.

2. **Orderly transition:** Movement to the agreed end-state should occur over a defined, time-limited period (10 years is preferred to align with existing planning horizons), with limits on year-on-year change. Any objectives related to long term harmonisation need to be workable if a statutory rates cap is introduced, not reliant on headroom a cap may remove.

3. **Financial efficiency over time:** Efficiency will accumulate over time. We should seek to manage the amalgamated balanced sheet to lower the cost of borrowing.

4. **Shared regional benefit:** The benefits of amalgamation should be shared across the region. Financial gains from scale, efficiency and a stronger balance sheet should support better outcomes for all communities, while recognising different starting points and service needs.

We have identified key risks and mitigations associated with the transition

1 TIMING RISKS

Risk: The Head Start pathway compresses what has historically been a multi-year reorganisation. Insufficient time to develop a credible model, test it with communities, complete iwi and PSGE engagement, and assemble full financial analysis has constrained the proposal.

Mitigation: Should the proposal be supported, Councils will require active support from Central Government, establishment of a dedicated programme office, early engagement with DIA officials and dedicated funding.

2 INSUFFICIENT REGIONAL ALIGNMENT

Risk: The proposal requires a majority of directly affected councils or population to be eligible. Councils across the region are at genuinely different stages. Fragmented or contested support could undermine the proposal's credibility and legitimacy.

Mitigation: Continue to use the Mayoral Forum to build alignment. Secure early Government support for additional areas of support or exploration through regional or city deal arrangements.

3 TREATY PARTNERSHIP RISKS

Risk: The Government criteria do not sufficiently address Treaty obligations, yet meaningful engagement and mana whenua partnership are essential to a legitimate proposal. Insufficient time, inadequate engagement processes, or proposals that do not give effect to existing Treaty settlements could weaken both political and community support.

Mitigation: Ensure mana whenua are involved in a meaningful way in partnership with Councils and that the Government works actively to support its Treaty obligations directly.

4 COMMUNITY LEGITIMACY AND ENGAGEMENT RISK

Risk: Structural change requires community endorsement, but the Head Start timeframe limits formal engagement before the deadline. This gives rise to risks including in terms of the current Local Government Act 2002 requirements.

Communities may perceive the process as rushed or imposed, particularly where local identity is strong.

Mitigation: Councils have undertaken informal community testing during the work programme (within the timeframe provided) to surface concerns and shape the model. Transitional LTP and consultation provisions may be required to support any change proposals.

5 FINANCIAL AND TRANSITION RISK

Risk: Reorganisation carries real transition costs, including systems consolidation, change management and potential stranded costs. Optimistic savings claims or underestimated transition costs, could damage credibility with communities and are exacerbated by the timing that has been provided.

Mitigation: High level financial modelling has been conservative. Further work will need to be undertaken to present transition costs and benefits transparently with sensitivity analysis; benchmark against prior reorganisations; and build a phased implementation plan that sequences systems consolidation and capability transfer to manage cashflow and delivery risk.

Indicative legislative amendments to support our proposal (1/3)

AMENDMENT SOUGHT	HIGH LEVEL DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY LEGISLATIVE VEHICLE
ESTABLISHMENT AND STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENTS		
Bespoke establishment legislation and restructuring Orders	Empower the reorganisation through bespoke legislation, regulation or restructuring Orders, following the 1989 precedent of Orders in Council giving effect to final reorganisation schemes under section 36 of the Local Government Act 1974, and the Auckland precedent of dedicated establishment Acts. Instruments would specify the boundaries of the new authority, the transfer of functions, assets, liabilities and staff, and the disestablishment of existing councils.	New Act and/or Orders in Council; modified application of Local Government Act 2002, Schedule 3
Statutory Transition Board	Establish a Transition Board in legislation with defined membership, powers and decision rights to lead implementation ahead of establishment day, including authority over organisation design, appointments and transition budgets (consider the Auckland Transition Agency precedent).	Bespoke establishment legislation
Governance structure specified in legislation	Specify in legislation the number of elected members at each layer of the new regional structure, the voting system, and boundaries and representation arrangements. The existing representation review timeline, process and public consultation requirements cannot be accommodated within the Head Start timeline to 2028, so these matters must be settled directly by the establishment instruments.	Bespoke establishment legislation; disapplication of Local Electoral Act 2001 representation review provisions
Community council powers and participative democracy arrangements	Specify in legislation the powers, functions and delegations of Community Councils and the associated participative democracy arrangements, rather than leaving these to post-establishment decisions of the new authority. This provides certainty to communities about the local layer before the inaugural election (compare the local board provisions in the Auckland legislation).	Bespoke establishment legislation
Mana whenua and Māori representation arrangements and Treaty settlements	Provide bespoke mana whenua and Māori representation arrangements in legislation, recognising that the standard statutory processes for establishing Māori wards and constituencies cannot be completed within the Head Start timeline. Include any bespoke arrangements related to existing Treaty settlement legislative requirements with a focus on those arrangements that impact decision making rights, committee structures and governance arrangements.	Bespoke establishment legislation; modified application of Local Electoral Act 2001, potential Treaty settlement legislation amendments (unless new mechanism created)

Indicative legislative amendments to support our proposal (2/3)

AMENDMENT SOUGHT	HIGH LEVEL DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY LEGISLATIVE VEHICLE
ELECTORAL TIMING AND PROCESS		
Deferral of current representation reviews	Relieve affected councils of the requirement to undertake representation reviews currently scheduled under the Local Electoral Act 2001, avoiding abortive effort and public consultation on arrangements that will be superseded by amalgamation.	Amendment to, or Order modifying, Local Electoral Act 2001
Timing of inaugural election	Consider providing for the inaugural election of the new authority (organisation rather than representation) in mid 2029 rather than at the October 2028 triennial election, aligning establishment day with the financial year and providing a longer implementation runway. This would require consequential extension of the terms of existing elected members or interim governance arrangements.	Bespoke establishment legislation; modification of Local Electoral Act 2001 triennial election provisions
Expedited remuneration determinations	Require the Remuneration Authority to make expedited determinations of remuneration for elected members at each layer of the new regional structure, within timeframes specified in legislation, so that remuneration is settled before nominations open for the inaugural election.	Direction in bespoke establishment legislation; Remuneration Authority Act 1977; Local Government Act 2002, Schedule 7
Modification of poll provisions	Current poll requirements could delay or prevent implementation of Head Start proposals. Consider either suspending the poll requirement for Head Start proposals, making poll results non-binding, or requiring a minimum participation threshold (for example 60% voter turnout) before a poll is binding.	Amendment to Local Government Act 2002, Schedule 3
FINANCIAL AND PLANNING TRANSITION		
Deferral of rates capping implementation	Delay the application of the proposed rates capping framework to affected councils and to the new authority for a defined transition period, so that transition costs and rates harmonisation can be funded and managed without breaching the cap.	Transitional provisions in rates capping legislation or bespoke establishment legislation
Deferral of long-term plan preparation	Defer the statutory requirement for disestablishing councils to prepare and adopt Long-Term Plans falling due before amalgamation, with the new authority preparing its first Long-Term Plan after establishment. Enhanced annual plans could apply in the interim, avoiding significant expenditure on plans that would be immediately superseded.	Modification of Local Government Act 2002, Part 6 (Auckland transitional provisions precedent)

Indicative legislative amendments to support our proposal (3/3)

AMENDMENT SOUGHT	HIGH LEVEL DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY LEGISLATIVE VEHICLE
IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT		
Local Government Commission role and resourcing	Clarify and resource the role of the Local Government Commission in supporting implementation, including any function in hearing objections and appeals on Head Start proposals, with an associated statutory mandate and appropriation.	Amendment to Local Government Act 2002; Budget appropriation
Transport related implementation	Integrating Transport infrastructure planning and investment – this group of assets is a significant regional investment and current spread across multiple agencies including the Crown. The governance structure for transport in a new model should consider the opportunity for greater Crown and local alignment around funding and operational decisions. This could include joint governance models.	Potential changes to regional land transport committees or funding arrangements in transport

Technical appendix 2

Te Tiriti partnership and settlement obligations

Mana whenua of the region

Mana whenua relationships across the region span the urban centres and the Wairarapa and extend well beyond the current administrative boundaries. They are place-based, not bounded the way council boundaries are. Multiple iwi may hold mana whenua in relation to the same places, particularly along the Kāpiti Coast and around Te Whanganui-a-Tara, where settlement history, migration and Treaty arrangements recognise overlapping interests.

Iwi	Location (broad)	Entity
Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika	Wellington City and the Hutt Valley	Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust
Ngāti Toa Rangatira	Porirua, Kāpiti, and across Cook Strait into Te Tau Ihu	Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira
Te Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai	Waikanae and the Kāpiti Coast	Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust
Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga / Ngā Hapū o Ōtaki	Ōtaki and the northern Kāpiti Coast, into Horowhenua	Ngā Hapū o Ōtaki
Rangitāne o Wairarapa	Western and central Wairarapa	Rangitāne Tu Mai Ra Trust
Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa	Eastern and southern Wairarapa	Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa Tāmaki nui-a-Rua Settlement Trust

Mana whenua entities extend beyond the post-settlement structure

Mana whenua standing is not held through post-settlement governance entities alone. It is also carried by representative rūnanga, by ahu whenua land trusts, and by marae. Several of these hold Treaty-like relationships with councils through Tākai Here memoranda of partnership. They are not PSGEs, but they are mana whenua, and the new model must carry these relationships through.

Entity	Type	Tākai Here (relationship)	Note
Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa ki Te Upoko o Te Ika a Māui	Representative rūnanga for Te Āti Awa, not a PSGE	Wellington City and Hutt City	Represents Te Āti Awa in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. The settlement entity for the same people is the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust.
Wellington Tenths Trust	Ahu whenua (Māori land) trust	Upper Hutt City Council has a formal Memorandum of Partnership relationship agreement in place with Wellington Tenths Trust	Beneficial owners descend from the Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Tama, Taranaki and Ngāti Ruanui hapū of 1839. About 81 hectares.
Palmerston North Māori Reserve Trust	Ahu whenua trust, 1866 origin	Upper Hutt City Council has a formal Memorandum of Partnership relationship agreement in place with Palmerston North Māori Reserve Trust	Sister trust, created when the Crown exchanged Te Āti Awa land interests in Wainuiomata and Lower Hutt for land now in central Palmerston North.
Te Tatau o Te Pō and Waiwhetū marae	Marae	Hutt City	Marae as Tākai Here partners in their own right

Most iwi in the region carry settlement legislation

Most iwi in the region carry Treaty settlement legislation and the relationship instruments that sit alongside them. These settlements are already in law. They sit outside local government reforms and cannot be removed by a council decision or an ordinary law change. Not every iwi in the region has settled. Where a settlement is not yet in place, the same durability must be carried by the establishing legislation for the new entity, and the door must stay open for later settlements to be recognised on the same footing.

The following table was compiled as a desktop exercise in June 2026. Figures provided are approximate, statuses change, and it is not a substitute for engagement. This list must be confirmed with each iwi before being relied on.

Iwi / entity	Act and status	Key redress and co-governance
Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust	Port Nicholson Block Claims Settlement Act 2009. Settled.	~$25m financial; sale-and-leaseback and deferred selection incl. Shelly Bay; 13 statutory acknowledgements incl. Wellington Harbour and Hutt River; 18 sites vested incl. Matiu, Mokopuna, Makaro and Parangarahu lakebeds; 8 place names; 100-year RFR; Harbour Islands Kaitiaki Board (equal with DOC).
Ngāti Toa Rangatira Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira	Ngāti Toa Rangatira Claims Settlement Act 2014. Settled.	~$70.6m financial incl. $10m for Cook Strait maritime domain; statutory acknowledgements over Cook Strait, Te Awarua-o-Porirua and Wellington Harbour; Poutiaki kaitiaki redress and Cook Strait Forum; Whitireia Park joint board; 21 place names; long-term RFR; full ownership of Kāpiti and Mana Islands vested 31 Dec 2024.
Te Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai Charitable Trust	No comprehensive settlement. Within Wai 2200. Tribunal Waikanae report (2022) urged negotiation.	Pre-settlement. Crown relationship still being formed. Recognised iwi authority under the RMA. Confirm status with the iwi.
Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga / Ngā Hapū o Ōtaki	No comprehensive settlement of Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga. Within Wai 2200. (Distinct from the Waikato Raukawa settlement.)	Pre-settlement. Confirm status and entity with the iwi.
Rangitāne o Wairarapa Rangitāne Tu Mai Ra Trust	Rangitāne Tu Mai Ra (Wairarapa Tāmaki nui-a-Rua) Claims Settlement Act 2017. Settled.	~$32.5m financial; right to buy 30% of Ngaumu Forest; statutory acknowledgements over the Ruamahanga and Manawatu rivers; Pukaha / Mount Bruce vested and gifted back; Rimutaka corrected to Remutaka; shared Wairarapa Moana co-governance.
Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa Kahungunu ki Wairarapa Tāmaki nui-a-Rua Settlement Trust	Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa Tāmaki nui-a-Rua Claims Settlement Act 2022. Settled.	~$115m financial and commercial; right to buy 70% of Ngaumu Forest; 27 sites vested; ~30 place names; statutory acknowledgements across the eastern Wairarapa; bed of Lake Wairarapa jointly vested; shared Wairarapa Moana co-governance.

Treaty settlements continued

Iwi / entity	Act and status	Key redress and co-governance
Muaupoko Muaupoko Tribal Authority	No comprehensive settlement. In negotiation since Terms of Negotiation in 2013; not yet at Agreement in Principle. Tribunal priority report 2017.	Pre-settlement. The 2017 Tribunal report recommended legislated kaitiaki governance of Punahau, Lake Horowhenua, and the Hokio Stream, still outstanding. A future settlement is likely to create a statutory lake-governance entity. In scope as Horowhenua is under consideration for inclusion. Confirm status with the iwi.
Rangitāne o Manawatū Rangitāne o Manawatū Settlement Trust	Rangitāne o Manawatū Claims Settlement Act 2016. Settled.	About $13.5m financial and commercial; 11 sites vested as conservation land; statutory acknowledgements and protocols. Rohe centred on the Manawatū, reaching into northern Horowhenua; primary regional partner is Horizons
Ngāti Wehi Pun ahau Te Kotahitanga o Te Iwi o Ngāti Wehi Pun ahau	No comprehensive settlement. Within Wai 2200.	Pre-settlement. Horowhenua District Council partner, based at Manakau; rohe extends across the Greater Wellington boundary.
Te Tūmatakahuki (Inc.)	No comprehensive settlement. Within Wai 2200 ambit.	Represents 12 hapū and marae of Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga in Horowhenua. Horowhenua District Council partner; memorandum of partnership signed December 2024.

Co-governance and co-management arrangements are in place

A range of co-governance and co-management arrangements already operate across harbours, lakes, islands and catchments, most of it created by settlement and sitting in statute. Any new entity would inherit these arrangements.

Arrangement	What it is, and who sits on it	Basis
Wairarapa Moana Statutory Board	Guardian of Wairarapa Moana and the Ruamahanga catchment. Ten members, an even iwi and Crown/council split: four Ngāti Kahungunu, one Rangitāne, two Minister of Conservation, two Greater Wellington, one South Wairarapa. Inaugural meeting March 2024.	Te Rohe o Rongokako Joint Redress Act 2022
Harbour Islands Kaitiaki Board	Co-governs the Mātiu, Mokopuna and Makaro island reserves in Wellington Harbour. Equal Department of Conservation and Taranaki Whānui membership.	Port Nicholson Block Act 2009
Whitireia Park joint board	Controls Whitireia Park and adjacent reserves at Porirua. Members appointed by Greater Wellington and Ngāti Toa.	Ngāti Toa Act 2014
Parangarahu Lakes comanagement (Ropu Tiaki)	Co-management of Lakes Kohangapiripiri and Kohangatera in East Harbour Regional Park between Greater Wellington and Taranaki Whānui. Plan adopted 2015.	Port Nicholson Block Act 2009
Te Wai Ora o Parirua / Porirua Harbour Accord	A multi-party accord to restore the mauri of Te Awarua-o-Porirua. Signed Waitangi Day 2025 by Ngāti Toa, Greater Wellington, Porirua City, Wellington City and Wellington Water. A shared-vision accord, not a statutory body.	Relationship accord, Feb 2025
Cook Strait Forum / Poutiaki Plan	Recognises Ngāti Toa as kaitiaki of Cook Strait. Cochaired by Greater Wellington and Marlborough, with a Poutiaki Plan councils must consider.	Ngāti Toa Act 2014
Te Kauru floodplain management	Collaborative Greater Wellington subcommittee for the upper Ruamahanga, with Masterton, Carterton, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and Rangitāne. A collaborative body, not statutory co-governance.	GWRC subcommittee, 2014
Lake Horowhenua Accord (Punahau	Collaborative restoration of Punahau, Lake Horowhenua and the Hokio Stream, led by the Lake Horowhenua Trust (the Muaupoko-owned lakebed) with the Horowhenua Lake Domain Board, Horowhenua District Council, the Department of Conservation and Horizons. A restoration partnership, not the statutory co-governance the Waitangi Tribunal recommended in 2017.	Relationship accord, 2013; Tribunal recommended statutory governance still Outstanding.