



Hamilton City Council Submission

Waikato Regional Council's 2024–2034 Draft Long Term Plan

Waikato Regional Council

7 May 2024



Improving the Wellbeing of Hamiltonians

Hamilton City Council is focused on improving the wellbeing of Hamiltonians through delivering to our five priorities of shaping:

- **A city that's easy to live in**
- **A city where our people thrive**
- **A central city where our people love to be**
- **A fun city with lots to do**
- **A green city**

The topic of this Council submission is aligned to all of Hamilton City Council's five priorities.

Council Approval and Reference

This Council submission was approved under delegated authority by members of the Waikato Regional Council/Hamilton City Council Governance Group on 7 May 2024.

Submission # 764.

Key Messages and Recommendations

1. Public Transport – Proposed Rating Change

2. We support that the Waikato Regional Council commence rating for public transport across the region (anticipated to be implemented in 2025/26) - noting that Option 1 outlined in the Draft 2024–2034 Long Term Plan is also Hamilton City Council’s preferred option.
3. We would, however, like to work with the Waikato Regional Council to understand where changes significantly impact on properties (prior to implementation of Option 1) to ensure that they are communicated effectively and clearly to Hamilton residents via a robust Communication Plan.
4. Council acknowledges the need to prioritise Low-Cost Low-Risk improvements to our public transport infrastructure (accessibility and safety emphasis, building and improving frequency while we investigate and improve capacity), improve the walking and biking network, and improve reliability and frequency on those key ridership services in the short-term, so we are actively building towards the Metro Spatial Plan and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).
5. We therefore support funding provision for the Rototuna Rocket service in 2025/26 as well as funding provision in the first three years of the 2024-2034 Long Term Plan to move the Meteor and the Comet to 10-minute frequencies, as well as a staged start to the Peacocke service.
6. We also acknowledge the challenge that the new Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2024 will present regarding co-funding, and the importance of Hamilton City Council and the Waikato Regional Council working closely to be aligned in our response to any co-funding decisions.
7. We would also encourage consideration of resourcing a business and community liaison lead role that would work directly with organisations, businesses, schools, community groups, and retirement villages to facilitate greater use of existing public transport services.

8. Funding of the Te Huia Train Service

9. We are encouraged by the results of the recent two-year review which show patronage levels at more than double the targets set in the single stage business case, with customer satisfaction at 98 percent for 2023 and an average of about 298 passengers on each weekday in 2024.
10. We support the Waikato Regional Council’s efforts to continue to increase Te Huia’s patronage levels and the work being undertaken to investigate options to increase fare box recovery (noting that Te Huia’s farebox recovery is higher than the national average for public transport).

11. Proposed Increase to the Natural Heritage Rate

12. Hamilton City Council, along with the Waikato Regional Council, support community restoration across Hamilton City in increasing native vegetation cover and pest control. Supporting community restoration is a cost effective and successful way of increasing our natural heritage.
13. We therefore support the Waikato Regional Council’s preferred option to increase the Natural Heritage Rate from \$5.80 to \$8.68 per property in 2024/25, in order to bring it in line with inflation since the programme was first established in 2005.

14. Regional Hazards and Emergency Response

15. We are supportive of the proposed development of the Regional Resilience Strategy and the associated plans that will support its implementation. We also acknowledge that the Regional Climate Change Risk Assessment is underway and note that the information in this assessment will be a critical component of developing and finalising the Regional Resilience Strategy.
16. We see this as being key to inform both our own local risk assessment, adaptation, and resilience planning as well as similar planning undertaken by the Waikato Regional Council.

17. Te Waka Funding

18. We acknowledge the importance of having a regional development agency but recognise that constrained funding for Te Waka across the Waikato Region is currently a significant challenge facing all councils.
19. We therefore support Option 1, which proposes to continue the \$750,000 annual funding for a further three years, using unallocated funds from the current Regional Development Fund.
20. However, we also recognise that other regional entities play a key role in ensuring continuation of the Waikato Region's ongoing economic development and prosperity - such as Hamilton and Waikato Tourism.
21. Hamilton City Council is of the view that the Waikato Regional Council is in an ideal position to take a pivotal role in coordinating and promoting the Waikato Region's economic development.
22. Entities such as Te Waka and Hamilton and Waikato Tourism could potentially, in the medium to long-term, receive funding from the Waikato Regional Council under a wider/comprehensive regional economic development funding model.
23. We therefore welcome the opportunity to have ongoing discussions with the Waikato Regional Council and other constituent councils as to how the Waikato Region's economic development can be more effectively coordinated and funded in forthcoming years (noting that one avenue for initiating this conversation is through the Waikato Mayoral Forum meetings).

24. Regional Spatial Planning

25. Hamilton City Council and the Waikato Regional Council, alongside other partners, have a long and successful history of spatial planning through Future Proof and recommend that any future spatial planning work undertaken by the Waikato Regional Council utilises this forum as a starting point to avoid duplication of effort.
26. As the metro centre of the Waikato Region, Hamilton City Council would like to signal its interest in being involved in any spatial planning work for the region as it progresses, noting the complementary expertise and capability that sits within our organisation.

27. Project Watershed

28. We look forward to continuation of the current working partnership with the Waikato Regional Council on Project Watershed, particularly regarding the following streams within the city boundary: Kirikiriroa Stream and gully areas; Te Awa o Katapaki Stream and gully areas; Waitawhiriwhiri Stream and gully areas; Mangaonua Stream and gully areas; Mangakootukutuku Stream and gully areas; Ohete Drainage District; and Komakorau Drainage District.
29. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing funding support provided by the Waikato Regional Council for the key programme of works undertaken in Hamilton City through Project Watershed, including the annual \$50,000 incremental increase over the 10-year period of the 2024–2034 Long Term Plan (noting that a base amount of \$718,700 has been allocated for 2024/25).

Introduction

30. Hamilton City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the **Waikato Regional Council's 2024–2034 Draft Long Term Plan**.
31. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the Waikato Regional Council representatives for presenting the key issues and proposed programmes that underpin their 2024–2034 Draft Long Term Plan at the 20 March 2024 Hamilton City Council Elected Members Briefing.
32. Council's submission focuses on the following key areas:
 - Public Transport – Proposed Rating Change
 - Funding of the Te Huia Train Service
 - Proposed Increase to the Natural Heritage Rate
 - Regional Hazards and Emergency Response
 - Te Waka Funding
 - Regional Spatial Planning
 - Project Watershed

Public Transport – Proposed Rating Change

33. Hamilton City Council supports that the Waikato Regional Council commence rating for public transport across the region (anticipated to be implemented in 2025/26) - noting that Option 1 outlined in the Draft 2024–2034 Long Term Plan is also Council's preferred option i.e.:
 - 80 percent of the funding required from rates comes from properties within 5 kilometres of a bus route.
 - 20 percent of the funding required from rates is paid by all other properties in the area.
 - A new area would be defined that reflects the higher levels of service experienced in Hamilton and urban areas, and key corridors in the Waikato and Waipā districts. All people in this 'metro' area will pay the same amount towards 'metro' services.
34. We note that under Option 1, the Metro rate (for Hamilton/parts of Waipā and Waikato) is proposed to be \$26.74 per \$100,000 for those properties within 5 kilometres of a bus stop and \$4.87 per \$100,000 District-wide – again, noting that these rates would be assessed in 2025/26 and adjusted after that for any price changes or new services introduced.
35. While Hamilton City Council acknowledges that the proposals for the public passenger transport rate being implemented across the region do not, in the main, result in much change for Hamilton as a whole, there will potentially be significant changes for individual properties.
36. We would therefore like to work with the Waikato Regional Council to fully understand these changes (prior to implementation of Option 1) to ensure that they are communicated effectively and clearly to Hamilton residents via a robust Communication Plan.
37. In addition, Hamilton City Council strongly recommends the ongoing continuing importance of the Waikato Regional Council undertaking its key role as a partner of Future Proof. This is particularly relevant to the ongoing implementation of the Hamilton–Waikato Metro Spatial Plan Transport Programme Business Case that the partners adopted in 2022 (and which was endorsed by the NZTA Board last year), noting the highly important role that the Waikato Regional Council has in its bus operational expenditure over our 30-year integrated transport programme.

38. The ongoing success of our metro bus network, as shown by the remarkably high patronage figures on services such as the Meteor, will likely deliver the core public transport improvements over the next decades whilst we continue our ongoing bus rapid transit network planning and gradually transition to a bus rapid transit core network.
39. It is vital that this network planning, aligned to growth in Hamilton and the wider Future Proof area, is continued and the aspirations and benefits shown in our joint work in 2022 with our Metro Spatial Plan transport programme are continued and fulfilled - we therefore support the public transport budget provisions included in the Draft Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2024–2054.
40. As noted in the following two points of Hamilton City Council’s 6 March 2024 submission to the Waikato Regional Council’s **Draft Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2024–2054**:
- We acknowledge the statement *“The roll-out of the tranche of MSP activities that are identified in the regional programme of transport activities in Part B of the RLTP will represent the first step in a mid to longer-term roll-out of programme implementation identified in the MSP business case to transform the metro spatial transport system.”*
 - However, we must emphasise that to support the Metro Spatial Plan, we need to prioritise Low-Cost Low-Risk improvements to our PT infrastructure (accessibility and safety emphasis, building and improving frequency while we investigate and improve capacity), improve the walking and biking network, and improve reliability and frequency on those key ridership services **in the short-term**, so we are actively **building towards** the Metro Spatial Plan and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). **This emphasis on the short-term building towards the Metro Spatial Plan is missing from the 2024 RLTP in our view.**
41. As an example of such improvements, Council understands that funding provision for the Rototuna Rocket service is in place for 2025/26 in the 2024–2034 Long Term Plan, subject to co-funding from the New Zealand Transport Agency.
42. We are pleased to see that this service is funded, noting the significant infrastructure investment that Hamilton City Council has already made (such as the in-lane bus stop on Hukanui Road) to support a frequent service on this route.
43. Council understands that there is also funding provision for the first three years of the 2024–2034 Long Term Plan (again, subject to co-funding from the New Zealand Transport Agency) to move the Meteor and the Comet to 10-minute frequencies, as well as a staged start to the Peacocks service.
44. We would like to acknowledge our support for these services and note the success of the Meteor and Comet routes to date in driving increased patronage.
45. We also acknowledge the challenge that the new Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2024 will present regarding co-funding, and the importance of Hamilton City Council and the Waikato Regional Council working closely to be aligned in our response to any co-funding decisions.
46. Council encourages the Waikato Regional Council to give consideration to resourcing a business and community liaison lead role that would work directly with organisations, businesses, schools, community groups, and retirement villages to facilitate greater use of existing public transport services.
47. We note that in the Waikato Regional Council’s Draft Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2024–2054 there is an objective for the public transport services to be carbon neutral for 2025 to 2050.
48. Whilst we recognise the leadership in having a carbon neutral public transport system, we believe it is important that all revenue through the public transport rate be directed to the delivery of public transport services, which will result in emissions reduction rather than the purchasing of offsets.

49. Increasing public transport patronage is a key part of how we can reduce transport emissions, along with the transition to electric buses. As noted previously, this approach aligns with our support for the Waikato Regional Council's preferred Option 1 to commence rating for public transport across the region (anticipated to be implemented in 2025/26).

Funding of the Te Huia Train Service

50. Hamilton City council is encouraged by the results of the recent two-year review, which show patronage levels at more than double the targets set in the single stage business case, with customer satisfaction at 98 percent for 2023 and an average of about 298 passengers on each weekday in 2024.
51. We support the Waikato Regional Council's efforts to continue to increase Te Huia's patronage levels and the work being undertaken to investigate options to increase farebox recovery (noting that Te Huia's farebox recovery is higher than the national average for public transport).
52. The ongoing work by the Waikato Regional Council around to Te Huia was acknowledged in Hamilton City Council's 6 March submission to the **Draft Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2024–2054** – [refer here](#)
53. As noted in this submission: *“We support embedding Te Huia as part of Hamilton's core transport functions and expanding passenger rail connections between Hamilton and other urban areas. We also support improving the rail freight system, not only due to the climate and safety benefits, but also because fewer heavy vehicles on Hamilton's roads will improve the amenity of our city through reduced visual, noise and air pollution”.*
54. We acknowledge that incremental improvements to the Te Huia services are planned from 2027/28 – year four of the Waikato Regional Council's 2024–2034 Long Term Plan i.e., there are therefore no funding implications for these improvements in the first three years of the Long Term Plan, subject to the ongoing and unchanged support from the New Zealand Transport Agency.
55. We also support the Waikato Regional Council's intention to make a submission to Auckland Council's 2024–2034 Draft Long Term Plan i.e., requesting that Auckland Council provide funding towards the Te Huia train service – recognising the benefits that the service provides to both the Auckland and Waikato regions.

Proposed Increase to the Natural Heritage Rate

56. Hamilton City Council's **Nature in the City Strategy** ([refer here](#)) recognises that Nature is our most powerful taonga – it makes a stronger, healthier city and people. The Strategy was developed in collaboration with the community and was approved on 1 December 2020 by Hamilton City Council's Environment Committee. The establishment of the Nature in the City (NITC) Programme, with funding of \$29 million over 10 years, was subsequently approved in May 2021.
57. Hamilton City Council recognises that increasing and improving our natural heritage (natural biodiversity), among other benefits, improves climate change resilience, water security, resilience from pests and disease, increases the health and wellbeing of people, improves purification of air and water, and provides cultural benefits.
58. The key objective for the NITC programme is to achieve 10% native vegetation cover in Hamilton by 2050. It is acknowledged that increasing and enhancing native vegetation cover is the first step toward improving ecological function and providing habitat for flora and fauna (including threatened species such as long-tailed bats and giant kokopu) and increasing peoples interaction with nature in the city.
59. A range of long-term restoration activities are needed to achieve this objective – this includes the many and varied projects that rely on funding from the Natural Heritage rate e.g., planting projects, predator control, and ecological restoration.

60. Hamilton City Council, along with the Waikato Regional Council, supports community restoration across Hamilton City in increasing native vegetation cover and pest control. Hamilton City has benefited from work supported by the Waikato Regional Council outside the city such as the Hamilton Halo project and the community group in Tamahere that are restoring the gully system in that area. Supporting community restoration is a cost effective and successful way of increasing our natural heritage.
61. We also note that the Waikato Regional Council is seeing escalating costs associated with undertaking this work and that they end up in a persistently oversubscribed rate position on the Natural Heritage Fund. Green infrastructure has been undervalued and underinvested in across the world. Investing in natural biodiversity has the largest benefits for green infrastructure. Keeping the fund at \$5.80 per property will result in increased underinvestment across the Waikato Region.
62. Hamilton City Council therefore supports the Waikato Regional Council's preferred option to increase the Natural Heritage Rate from \$5.80 to \$8.68 per property in 2024/25 in order to bring it in line with inflation since the programme was first established in 2005. We also note that this rate is proposed to increase to \$9.69 per property in 2025/26 and then \$10 per property in 2026/27.
63. The key benefits of the Natural Heritage Rate are to:
 - Fund more community conservation projects.
 - Protect and restore our region's unique biodiversity.
 - Achieve biodiversity goals faster.
64. We look forward to continuing to work with the Waikato Regional Council to ensure the ongoing success of projects undertaken through funding from the Natural Heritage rate.

Regional Hazards and Emergency Response

65. In this section (page 26) of the Waikato Regional Council's 2024–2034 Draft Long Term Plan, we note the proposed development of the Regional Resilience Strategy. Hamilton City Council is supportive of this Strategy and the associated plans that will support its implementation.
66. We acknowledge that the Regional Climate Change Risk Assessment is underway and note that the information in this assessment will be a critical component of developing and finalising the Regional Resilience Strategy.
67. Hamilton City Council was involved in the risk identification process in 2022 but has had no further involvement with this project – we see it as being key to inform our own local risk assessment, adaptation, and resilience planning as well as similar planning undertaken by the Waikato Regional Council.

Te Waka Funding

68. Te Waka was established in 2018 by the Waikato Mayoral Forum, with its purpose being to support and drive economic performance across the Waikato Region, which is undertaken by facilitating industry growth and attracting investment.
69. We acknowledge the importance of having a regional development agency but recognise that constrained funding for Te Waka across the Waikato Region is currently a significant challenge facing all councils.
70. We note that the Waikato Regional Council is currently providing funding of \$750,000 per annum from investment returns (over the past three years), and that Option 1 in the 2024–2034 Draft Long Term Plan proposes to continue the \$750,000 annual funding to Te Waka for a further three years, using unallocated funds from the Regional Development Fund (created in 2015 for environment-friendly economic projects) - ensuring continuation of an agency that can champion regional economic growth through key partnerships.

71. Hamilton City Council supports Option 1, noting that it will have a nil impact on rates for 2024/25 – 2026/27, as well as a nil impact on debt. We also support the notion that continued funding would depend on new accountability measures to help ensure delivery of key outcomes.
72. However, we also recognise that other regional entities play a key role in ensuring continuation of the Waikato Region’s ongoing economic development and prosperity - such as Hamilton and Waikato Tourism (in this case, noting that there is also close alignment with the Waikato Regional Council’s and Hamilton and Waikato Tourism’s geographical areas of responsibility).
73. Hamilton City Council is of the view that the Waikato Regional Council is in an ideal position to take a pivotal role in coordinating and promoting the Waikato Region’s economic development.
74. Entities such as Te Waka and Hamilton and Waikato Tourism could potentially, in the medium to long-term, receive their funding from the Waikato Regional Council under a wider/comprehensive regional economic development funding model.
75. Looking past the first three years of the Waikato Regional Council’s 2024–2034 Long Term Plan then (i.e., Te Waka receiving funding of \$750,000 per year between 2024/25 – 2026/27), Hamilton City Council would welcome the opportunity to have ongoing discussions with the Waikato Regional Council and other constituent councils as to how the Waikato Region’s economic development can be more effectively coordinated and funded.
76. One avenue for initiating this conversation is through the Waikato Mayoral Forum meetings.

Regional Spatial Planning

77. Hamilton City Council is supportive of spatial planning as a way to comprehensively plan across land use and infrastructure disciplines. We note that Hamilton City Council and the Waikato Regional Council, alongside other partners, have a long and successful history of spatial planning through Future Proof and recommend that any future spatial planning work undertaken by the Waikato Regional Council utilises this forum as a starting point to avoid duplication of effort.
78. As the metro centre of the Waikato Region, Hamilton City Council would like to signal its interest in being involved in any spatial planning work for the region as it progresses, noting the complementary expertise and capability that sits within our organisation.

Project Watershed

79. For context, we note that Project Watershed is a joint plan of work between Hamilton City Council and the Waikato Regional Council to ensure a holistic approach to river management. Hamilton City Council provides services on behalf of the Waikato Regional Council with a focus on:
 - River Management - ensures the river catchment is free flowing and stable.
 - Soil Conservation - ensures soil types are stabilised sustainably.
 - Flood Protection – undertakes works that protect land and assets from natural flood events.
80. While Hamilton City Council is responsible for the collection, transfer, and treatment of stormwater (generated through the urbanisation of land within the city boundaries), we recognise that Project Watershed is the result of the Waikato Regional Council and Hamilton City Council acknowledging that the latter already undertakes a set programme of works in Hamilton that are primarily aligned with Project Watershed outcomes.
81. By working in partnership, significant portions of each organisation’s work programme outcomes can be achieved more efficiently and holistically.

82. We therefore look forward to the continuation of the current working partnership with the Waikato Regional Council on Project Watershed, particularly regarding the following streams within the city boundary: Kirikiriroa Stream and gully areas; Te Awa o Katapaki Stream and gully areas; Waitawhiriwhiri Stream and gully areas; Mangaonua Stream and gully areas; Mangakootukutuku Stream and gully areas; Ohete Drainage District; and Komakorau Drainage District.
83. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing funding support provided by the Waikato Regional Council for the key programme of works undertaken in Hamilton City through Project Watershed, including the annual \$50,000 incremental increase over the 10-year period of the 2024–2034 Long Term Plan (noting that a base amount of \$718,700 has been allocated for 2024/25).
84. The \$50,000 incremental annual increase supports the increasing level of work for Project Watershed, some of which can be attributed to the impacts of climate change on waterways.

Further Information and Hearings

85. Should the Waikato Regional Council require clarification of the submission from Hamilton City Council, or additional information, please contact **James Clarke** (Unit Manager - Strategy and Planning) on **027 808 9580** or email james.clarke@hcc.govt.nz in the first instance.
86. Hamilton City Council representatives **do wish to speak at the hearings** that are scheduled to commence on 14 May 2024 and welcome the opportunity to have ongoing discussions around the key areas of this submission with the Waikato Regional Council.

Yours faithfully



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