Northland local government – a staged path to reform

July 2026

Whangarei District Council

Northland Regional Council
Te Kaunihera ā rohe o Te Taitokerau

Te Kaunihera o Te Hiku o te Ika
Far North District Council

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 What is Northland proposing?

Whangarei District Council and Far North District Council consider that Northland should embark on a staged journey towards a single Northland unitary authority as the region's long-term governance model.

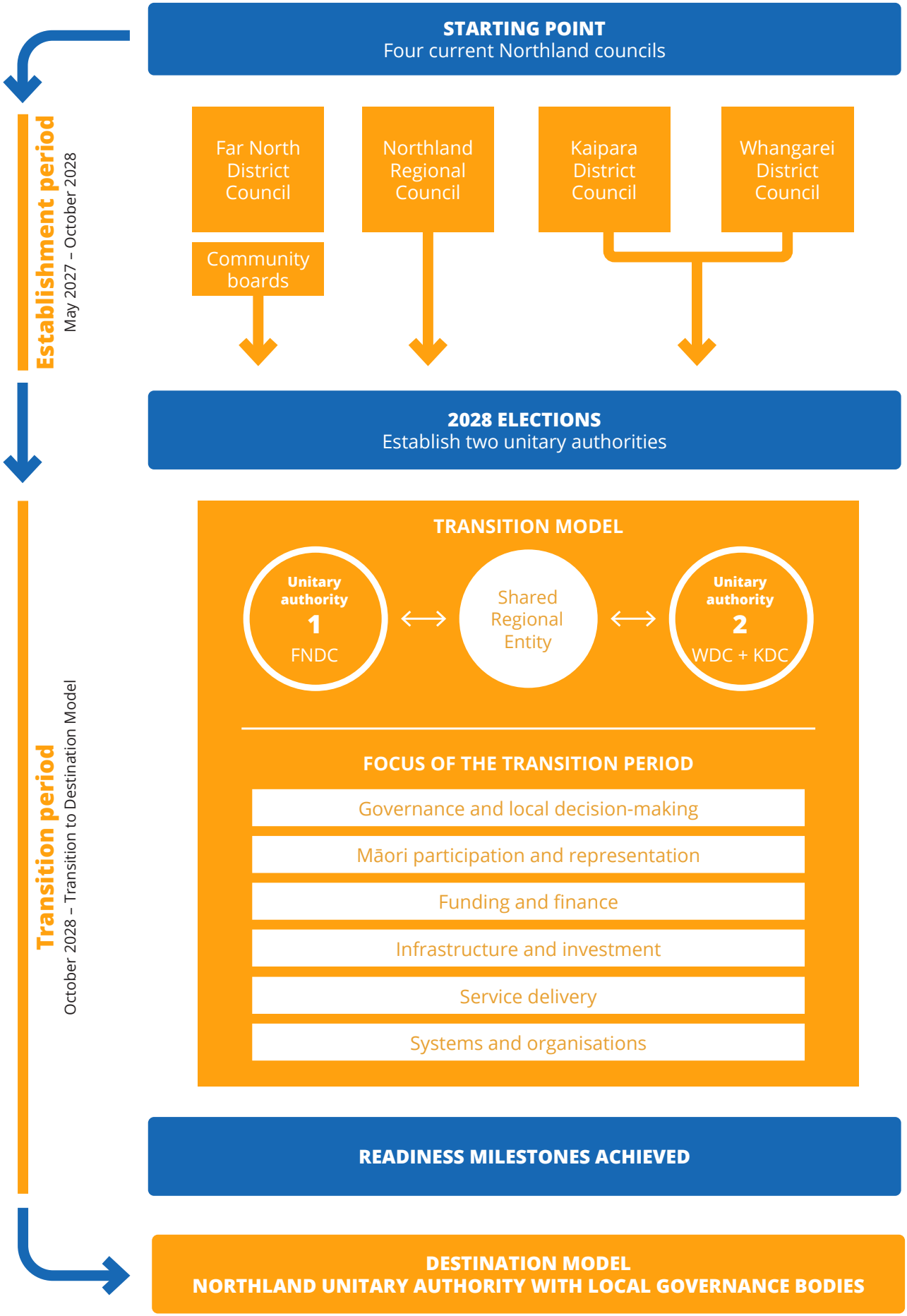
A single Northland unitary authority, supported by a meaningful local governance layer, provides stronger regional leadership, clearer accountability, more integrated planning and infrastructure decisions, and the strongest alignment with the future planning system.

This Outline Proposal includes a staged pathway that establishes two unitary authorities and a Shared Regional Entity from October 2028, before transitioning to a single Northland unitary authority within an agreed timeframe of between one and three electoral cycles, based on the achievement of agreed milestones.

This staged approach is intended to realise some of the benefits of reorganisation immediately by reducing from four councils to two, reduce the implementation risk between now and the 2028 elections, and most importantly, create the time needed to ensure a successful Northland unitary authority is established with the support of its communities.

Community feedback, engagement with iwi and hapū, and discussions with elected members have consistently highlighted that support for local government reorganisation depends on maintaining strong local voice, meaningful Māori participation, affordable and responsive services, fair access to investment, and decision-making that remains connected to communities.

While the detailed design of governance arrangements will occur over a number of phases, the supporting councils consider that these outcomes should guide the development of any future Northland governance model. The preferred direction is a model that combines stronger regional coordination with empowered local governance bodies, ensuring communities retain meaningful influence over matters that directly affect them, while enabling Northland to work more effectively on issues that are regional in nature.


STARTING POINT
Four current Northland councils
Establishment period
May 2027 – October 2028
Far North District Council
Community boards
Northland Regional Council
Kaipara District Council
Whangarei District Council
2028 ELECTIONS
Establish two unitary authorities
Transition period
October 2028 – Transition to Destination Model
TRANSITION MODEL
Unitary authority 1
FNDC
Shared Regional Entity
Unitary authority 2
WDC + KDC
FOCUS OF THE TRANSITION PERIOD
Governance and local decision-making
Māori participation and representation
Funding and finance
Infrastructure and investment
Service delivery
Systems and organisations
READINESS MILESTONES ACHIEVED
DESTINATION MODEL
NORTHLAND UNITARY AUTHORITY WITH LOCAL GOVERNANCE BODIES

1.2 Why is change needed?

The question of local government reorganisation in Northland has been considered previously. After assessing a range of alternatives, the Local Government Commission (LGC) identified a single Northland-wide unitary authority as its preferred option in 2013, citing the benefits of stronger regional leadership and more integrated decision-making across the region.

Northland's councils work closely together and, since the Commission's review, have made significant progress through regional collaboration initiatives such as the Northland Forward Together programme and most recently, Northland Waters. However, the region continues to operate through four separate councils, requiring substantial coordination to achieve regional outcomes.

The coordination required to achieve regional outcomes is likely to become more challenging as the region implements the new planning system, responds to growth and infrastructure pressures, and pursues opportunities such as the Northland Regional Deal.

1.3 Why not move directly to one unitary authority?

While there is a compelling long-term case for a single unitary authority, the assessment undertaken through this proposal identified several significant issues that require further work before a Northland-wide governance model can be successfully implemented.

The most significant challenges identified through the process are outlined below.

Challenge	Why it matters
Local governance and local voice	Communities want confidence that local priorities and local decision-making will continue to influence future governance arrangements.
Māori representation and participation	There is currently no agreed Northland-wide approach to Māori representation or iwi and hapū participation.
Financial integration	Councils currently operate with different debt levels, rating structures, funding approaches and financial strategies. Future arrangements will need to provide confidence that costs, benefits and investment priorities are shared fairly and transparently across the region.
Allocation of investment and resources	Northland's districts have different growth pressures, infrastructure needs, service levels and community priorities. Future arrangements will need to provide confidence that infrastructure investment, organisational resources and service levels are managed in a fair and transparent way across communities with different needs and priorities.
Community confidence	Preliminary engagement identified support for many of the benefits of reorganisation, but concerns remain about affordability, local representation, service delivery and implementation risks.

1.4 Why a staged transition?

The proposed transition model allows Northland to begin local government reorganisation before 2028 while also creating time to address the challenges identified above collaboratively and deliberately, in consultation with communities, iwi and hapū.

It provides opportunities to progressively align financial strategies, service delivery approaches and organisational systems before the final transition occurs, meaning that the scale benefits of the Destination Model may be realised sooner following the final transition.

It also reduces the amount of organisational change that must be implemented before the 2028 local government elections, at a time when councils are also responding to planning reform, water services reform and other significant changes affecting local government.

Transitioning from four councils to a regional unitary authority in one step is not supported by the proposing councils, or the Northland communities at this stage.

1.5 How does the proposal perform against the Head Start criteria?

The assessment concluded that both models satisfy the Government's requirements and represent an improvement on the current arrangements. The Destination Model generally provides the strongest long-term outcomes. However, the Transition Model offers a more manageable implementation pathway while still achieving material improvements over the status quo.

Assessment criteria	One unitary (Destination)	Two unitary + SRE (Transition)
Supports the new planning system	Strong alignment with the intent of the new planning system. Single planning authority with regional integrated planning and strategic infrastructure strategy, funding and delivery. No catchment fragmentation.	Simpler than the status quo for delivering new planning system. Provides continuity and reduces implementation risk by sequencing major reform programmes.
Simplifies local governance	Maximum reduction in duplication, from four councils down to one. Simplifies planning and reporting. Single body for accountability but requires carefully designed local governance bodies.	Four councils to two reduces duplication, and complexity reduces for community and other agencies. Requires ongoing coordination through the Shared Regional Entity for regional functions.
Economies of scale	Maximises the available economies of scale. Larger rating base lowers the cost to serve per household. Combining teams increases capability and provides workforce resilience. Benefits may be largely non-financial depending on detailed design decisions, particularly on representation model.	Modest economies of scale initially. Opportunities to improve economies of scale through regional collaboration and shared services as systems and processes are aligned over time. Shortens the timeframe to realise benefits of single unitary post Transition.

Assessment criteria	One unitary (Destination)	Two unitary + SRE (Transition)
Maintains local voice	Designed mindfully and collaboratively, local body [1] representation is the primary mechanism for maintaining and strengthening local voice in a future unitary authority.	Maintains local voice at no less than current levels, with opportunities for each unitary authority to strengthen representation arrangements during the Transition Period.
Deliverability	The Transition Period allows for alignment of systems and processes over time, and the deliberate design of the one unitary model, to ensure that trade-offs between efficiencies and other factors are intentional and understood.	Four councils into two is a simpler initial transition than four into one. Requires bespoke legislation for the Transition Period but provides a practical and lower-risk pathway for transitioning into one unitary authority.

1.6 What is the Government being asked to support?

This Outline Proposal seeks Government support for Northland to progress to the Detailed Proposal stage on the basis of a staged pathway to a single Northland unitary authority.

The Detailed Proposal phase would:

- confirm the governance, funding and service delivery arrangements for the Transition Model and establish the implementation programme required before the 2028 elections
- develop the milestones and timeframe for the transition pathway, legislated and supported by central government, towards the Destination Model.

In summary, this Outline Proposal is based on the proposition that Northland should move to a single unitary authority. A staged transition provides the most practical and deliverable pathway for achieving that outcome while maintaining local voice, building public confidence and reducing implementation risk.

1 This Outline Proposal uses the term 'local body' or 'local governance body' to refer to this yet-to-be designed layer of local representation, to prevent assumptions about how they may or may not operate compared to existing community board and local board structures.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

This Outline Proposal has been prepared under the Government's Head Start for Simplifying Local Government pathway. Head Start was established to enable councils to develop locally led proposals for governance reform that support the Government's objectives for simplified local government, maintaining local voice, improved alignment with the future planning system, and more effective delivery of local government services.

The proposal has been developed by Northland's supporting councils in accordance with the Head Start guidance and assessment framework. It sets out a strategic case for change, describes the preferred governance pathway for Northland, assesses that pathway against the Government's assessment criteria, and identifies the matters that should be addressed during the development of the Detailed Proposal.

If accepted by Government, the next stage of the process would be preparation of a Detailed Proposal. This would include further engagement with communities, iwi, hapū, post-settlement governance entities, central government and other stakeholders.

2.2 Proposing councils

This proposal considers the future local government arrangements for the whole of the Northland region. The region comprises Far North District Council, Kaipara District Council, Whangarei District Council and Northland Regional Council.

Far North District Council and Whangarei District Council have resolved to support the progression of a proposal for the staged transition pathway.

Kaipara District Council does not support progressing the proposed Head Start pathway in its current form. While acknowledging the potential long-term benefits that may arise from closer regional collaboration, Kaipara District Council considers that the proposal has not yet demonstrated sufficient community mandate, evidence of net benefit, or resolution of key matters relating to local representation, affordability, governance, financial integration and service delivery.

Kaipara District Council remains concerned that design, funding and implementation issues remain untouched and unresolved, and that progressing the proposal ahead of addressing these matters may create risks for our communities, ratepayers and future governance arrangements. Kaipara District Council's preference is that further analysis, engagement and evidence-based assessment occur before any commitment is made to structural reform or transition arrangements. In the absence of this evidence-based analysis, Kaipara District Council believes the best approach is for three unitary authorities in Northland that share services, with any future amalgamation proposal being subject to robust evidence and strong community mandate.

While the Head Start process allows a proposal to proceed with the support of a majority of councils and population, differing council positions create an implementation risk that will need to be actively managed through subsequent phases.

2.3 Northland Regional Council

Northland Regional Council has been closely involved throughout the Head Start process. The Council has participated in both the Elected Member Steering Group and staff working group and has contributed to the development, assessment and refinement of reform options, the consideration of supporting evidence, and the preparation of this Outline Proposal.

The Northland Regional Council position on Local Government reform is that the preferred outcome remains the establishment of a single Northland unitary authority, with empowered local community bodies, with full transition to this model by October 2028. However, in the interests of supporting a Northland-led approach, Northland Regional Council supports this Head Start Outline Proposal conditional on:

- the transition occurring within one electoral term
- statutory regional council functions (attachment 1) remain delivered at the regional level during the transitional period.

NRC is preparing for a transition to a single Northland unitary authority and is committed to continued constructive engagement and participation for the best outcome for Northland from this process.

2.4 Proposal overview and Head Start eligibility

2.4.1 Proposal overview

Whangarei District Council and Far North District Council propose a staged transition pathway to a single unitary authority for the Northland region.

The supporting councils consider a single council responsible for both regional and territorial authority functions provides the strongest platform for integrated planning, infrastructure investment, environmental management, economic development, and regional leadership. This is the Destination Model.

To achieve this outcome, this proposal seeks Government support for an interim Transition Period. From the 2028 local government elections, Northland would move from three territorial councils and a regional council to two unitary authorities, supported by a Shared Regional Entity responsible for regional functions. This arrangement would be temporary and would exist for a period of between one and three electoral cycles, before the region-wide unitary authority was established.

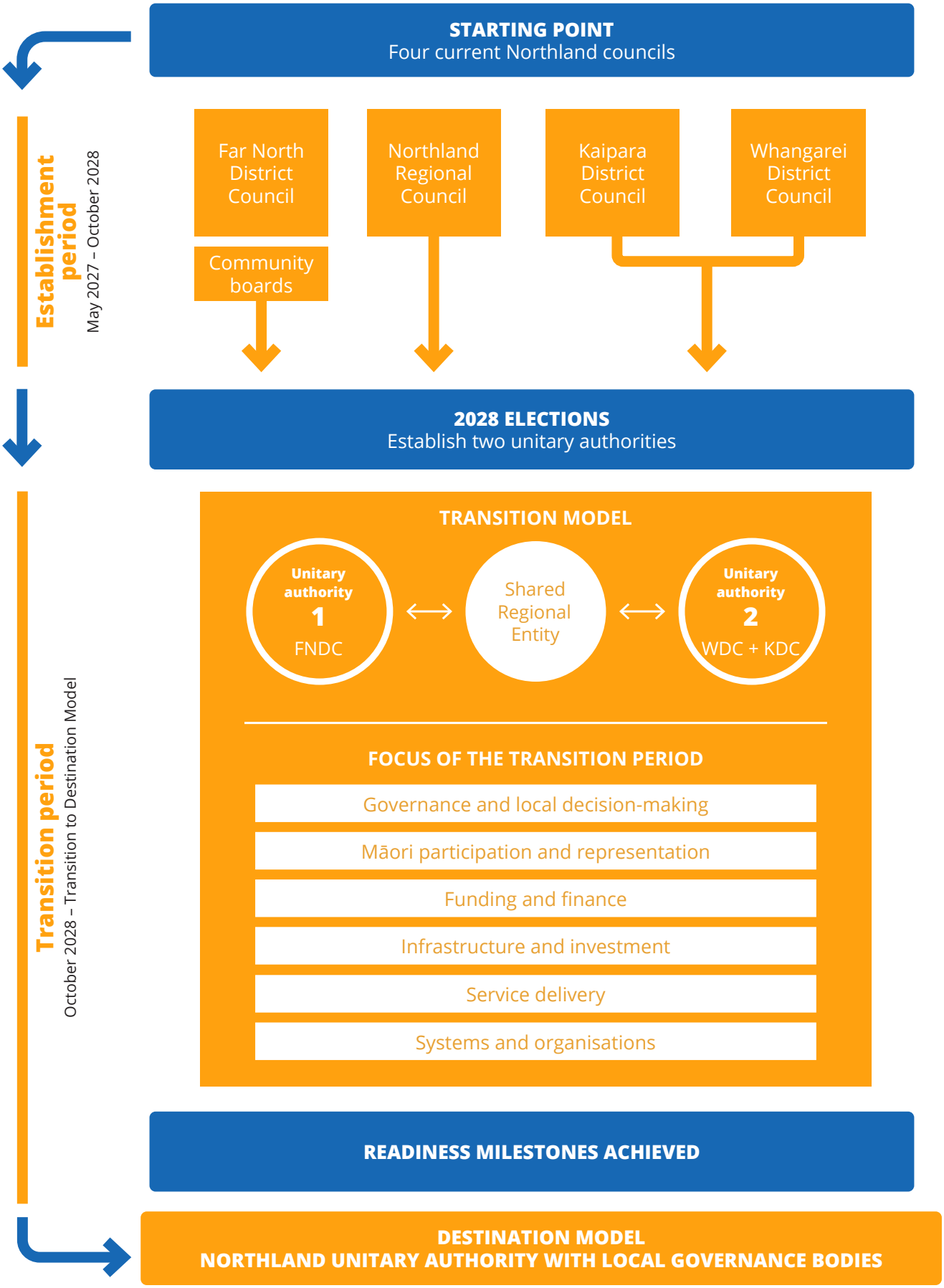
The purpose of the Transition Period is to provide time to resolve a number of important issues that will influence the long-term success of a single Northland council. These include future arrangements for local body representation, Māori representation and partnership arrangements, the allocation of investment and resources across the region, financial integration, and how differences in service levels and community expectations should be reflected within a single organisation.

The proposed boundary for the two unitary authorities in the Transition Period enables existing approaches to local body representation and Māori representation and participation to continue while Northland works through the design of a future single unitary authority. During the Transition Period, each unitary authority may also refine and strengthen these arrangements where appropriate, being mindful of the need for a common approach under the Destination Model.

This Outline Proposal explains why the councils consider a single Northland unitary authority to be the right long-term direction for the region, and why a staged transition provides the strongest foundation for achieving it successfully. While this approach extends the overall reorganisation process, it reduces the amount of change that must be implemented before the 2028 local government elections, at a time when councils are also preparing for planning reform, the establishment of Northland Waters, and other significant changes affecting local government. It also creates opportunities to progressively align organisations during the Transition Period. By managing the transition with the Destination Model in mind, the cost and complexity associated with two phases of change can be reduced to a certain extent.

The Detailed Proposal phase would confirm the transition pathway, key milestones, governance arrangements, and the timeframe for establishing the single Northland unitary authority.

Figure 1
Staged transition pathway



2.4.2 Head Start eligibility

Table 1 confirms that this option clears the eligibility threshold and can now be considered on its merits against the assessment criteria.

Table 1
Assessment against eligibility requirements

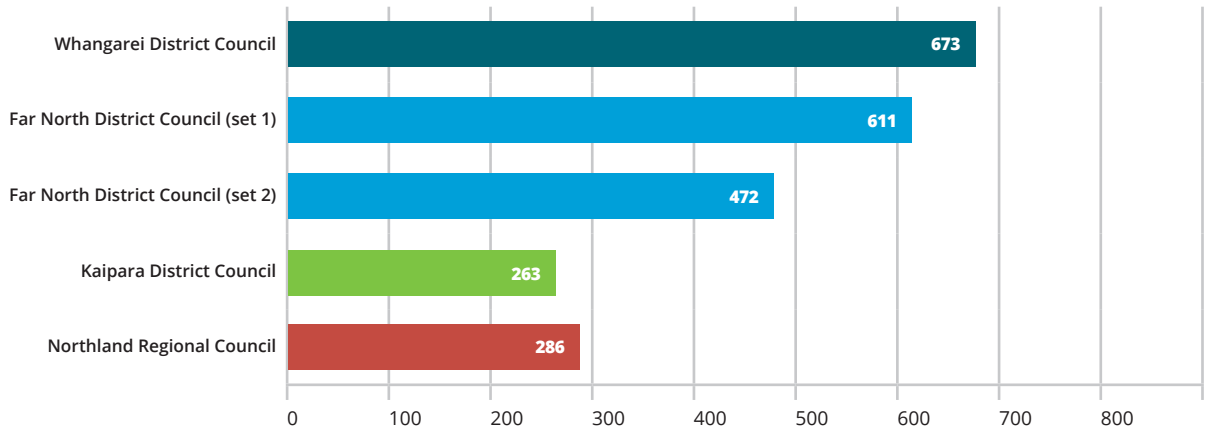
Eligibility Requirement	Is the requirement met?	Rationale
Joint Proposal	✓	Outline Proposal is supported by at least two territorial authorities.
Creation of Unitary authority (-ies)	✓	Establishes two unitary authorities by October 2028 and a single unitary authority after an agreed time period.
Majority Support Test	✓	Two councils together represent a majority of directly affected territorial authorities and a majority of the population.
Reduction in Number of Authorities	✓	Four councils would be replaced by two councils initially, and ultimately a single authority.

2.5 Preliminary community feedback

2.5.1 Survey

Across May and June 2026, all four Northland councils ran surveys asking their communities about the future of local government in the region. Each council asked the same underlying questions: what shape local government should take, what the benefits of change could be, what concerns people had, and what mattered most to them if change went ahead.

Figure 2
Survey responses received per council



A total of 2,305 responses were received across the region. Whangarei District Council received 673 responses, Far North District Council 1,083 across two surveys, Kaipara District Council 263, and Northland Regional Council 286.

The surveys provide a snapshot of community views at an early stage in this process, before any decisions had been made, and the feedback sits alongside the other information and analysis set out in the rest of this proposal.

2.5.2 What communities said about structure

The three district councils asked about structural preference, and Northland Regional Council did not. Because the wording and the number of options differed between councils, a like-for-like comparison is only possible in places.

The surveys did not ask about the staged transition model. It emerged through the options analysis, which was underway while the surveys were live, so no council was able to put it to its community. However, the surveys did ask the question at the heart of that model – whether Northland should have two councils or one. No information was provided about the potential for local governance bodies under any model.

Across the three district councils that asked, more people supported some form of two-council arrangement than supported a single council covering all of Northland, though they did not agree on which two councils should pair up.

Support for a single Northland-wide council was steady but never dominant, running between roughly a quarter and a third in each district – 24.6 per cent in the Far North, 32.3 per cent in Kaipara, and 33 per cent in Whangārei.

Figure 3

Percentage of responses that support a single Northland-wide unitary authority

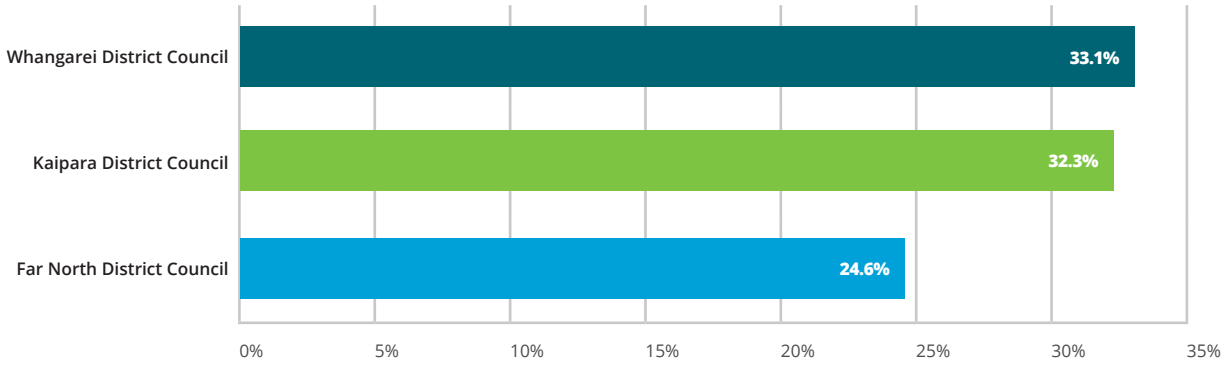


Figure 4

Percentage of responses that support WDC alone; FNDC and KDC combined

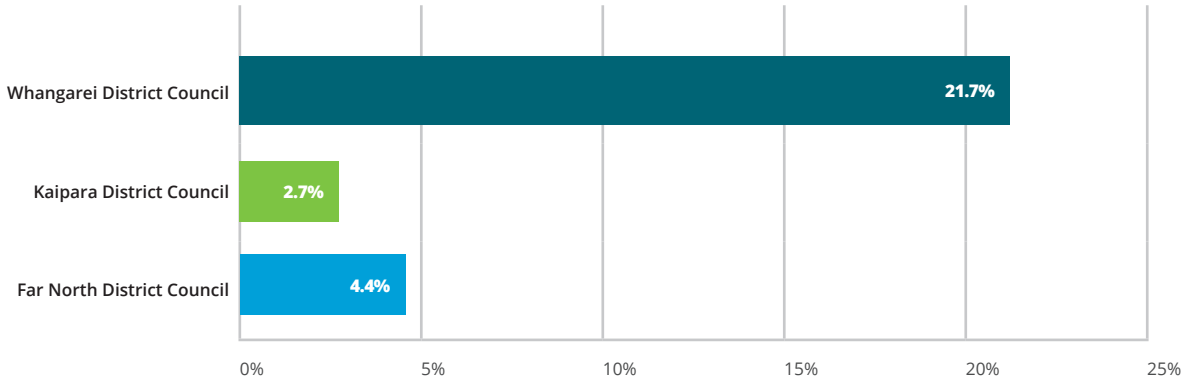


Figure 5

Percentage of responses that support FNDC alone; WDC and KDC combined

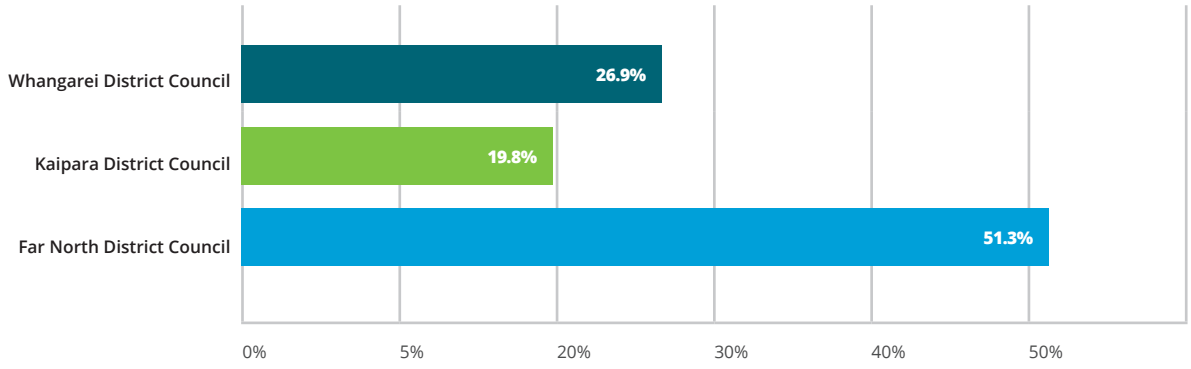
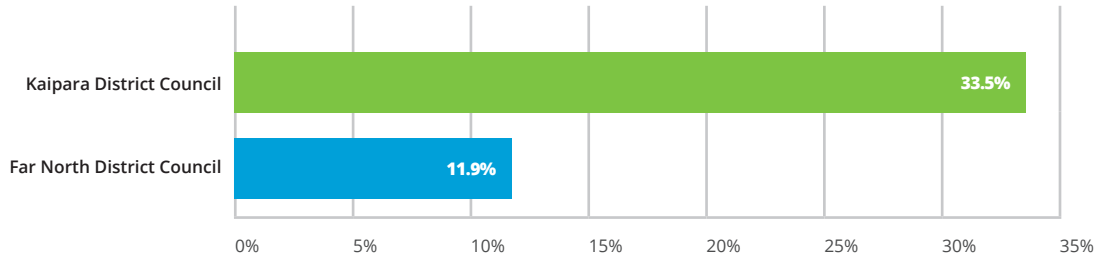


Figure 6

Percentage of responses that support KDC alone; WDC and FNDC combined



One option alone passed 50 per cent anywhere: 51.3 per cent of Far North District Council respondents backed a single unitary authority for the Far North. Whangarei District Council's community showed the strongest support for a single Northland-wide authority. Kaipara District Council was almost evenly split between a single unitary authority for Kaipara and joining a single Northland-wide authority.

2.5.3 What communities saw as the benefits

Respondents were far more united on outcomes than on structure. Asked what any change could deliver, they pointed consistently to a simpler system, lower costs, less duplication and stronger regional planning.

Figure 7

Whangarei District Council: What do you think would be the benefits of having one or two councils for Northland / Te Tai Tokerau?

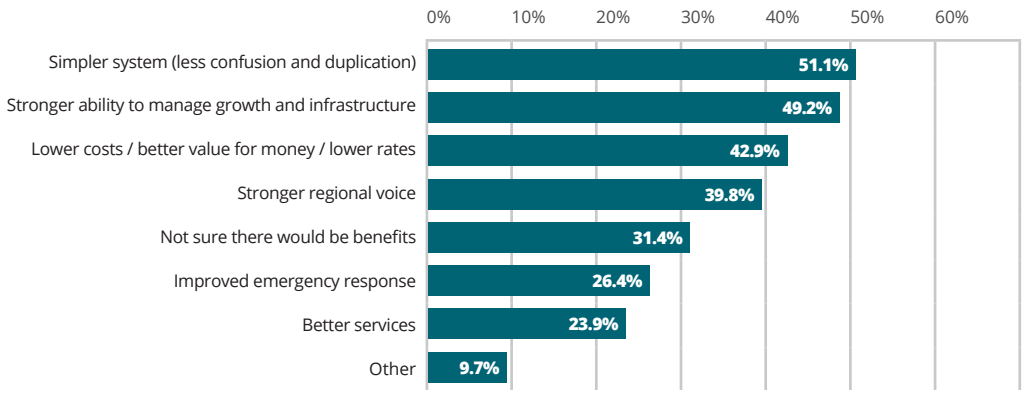


Figure 8

Northland Regional Council: What benefits would you like to see from having fewer councils in Northland / Taitokerau?

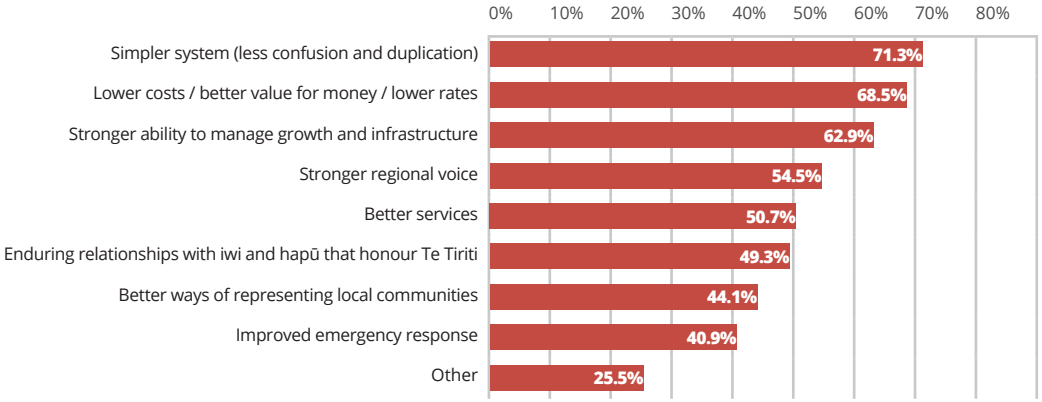


Figure 9

Far North District Council: What positive changes or opportunities could come from councils working differently across Northland?

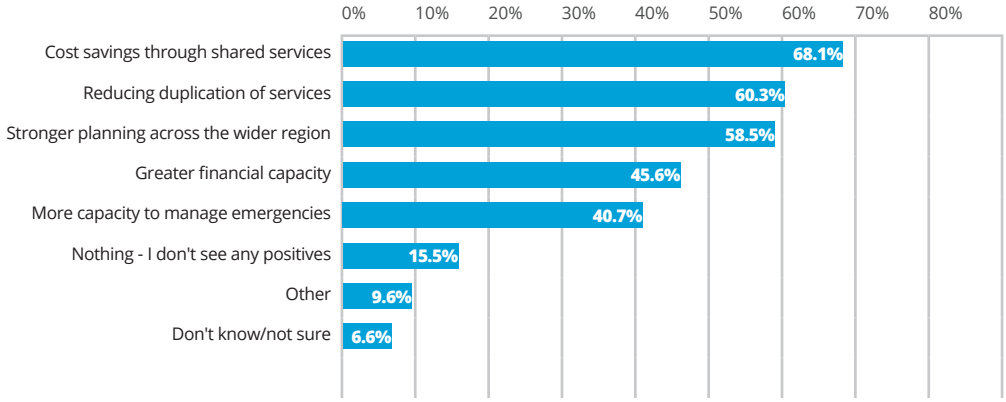
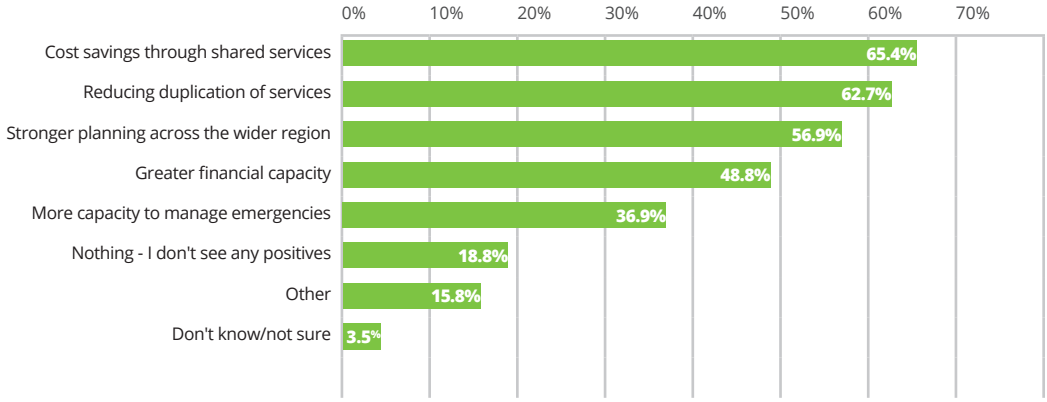


Figure 10

Kaipara District Council: What positive changes or opportunities could come from councils working differently across Northland?



2.5.4 What matters most

Through the surveys, communities responded that what matters most to them is:

- affordable rates and value for money
- strong local voice and representation
- accessible, responsive local services
- protection of rural and remote communities
- a well-managed transition with minimal disruption to communities and services
- protection of Northland's natural environment
- strong relationships with iwi and hapū.

Taken together, the feedback suggests that Northlanders are less united on the question of institutional form than they are on the conditions required for successful reform. The engagement indicates that communities want greater confidence regarding how local voice will be protected, how the interests of diverse communities will be reflected in future governance arrangements, and how potential impacts on rates, services, and representation will be managed.

These findings have informed the proposed transition pathway set out in this Outline Proposal. The proposed transition period is intended to provide the time, engagement, and governance mechanisms necessary to address these matters in partnership with communities, iwi and hapū, and other stakeholders before any permanent governance arrangements are implemented.

2.6 Preliminary iwi and hapū engagement

Councils across Northland have long-standing relationships with iwi and hapū, grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a shared commitment to working together. Councils and iwi and hapū work together through Treaty settlement arrangements and partnership agreements, and councils carry obligations to Māori under settlement legislation, the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Local Government Act 2002.

The engagement described here is preliminary and forms the starting point for further dialogue as the work progresses. Northland has the second-highest proportion of Māori of any region in the country, and a model for the future of local government will be stronger for being built alongside iwi.

2.6.1 What we did

In its communications and engagement plan, the Northland Local Government Reform Elected Member Steering Group identified the need for "early, appropriate, and mana-enhancing engagement with iwi, hapū, and PSGEs," and the importance of Te Tiriti relationships and of maintaining and strengthening them through any future arrangements.

The engagement to date is set out below.

- Representatives of the Elected Member Steering Group, met with Te Kahu o Taonui on 25 June and 10 July 2026.
- Letters were sent to post-settlement governance entities across the region, inviting them to participate in the community surveys, with a commitment to engage further if an outline proposal is submitted and Government agrees to it.
- Community surveys ran across all four councils and were open to iwi, hapū, marae and Māori organisations. They were actively promoted through Māori networks, particularly in the Far North.
- Far North District Council held town hall hui in Kaitāia and Kaikohe, and at Te Tii marae in Waitangi. These were attended by iwi representatives.
- Whangarei District Council, Far North District Council, and Northland Regional Council engaged through their existing council–iwi and hapū partnership committees.

2.6.2 What we heard from iwi

Te Kahu o Taonui, the collective of Te Tai Tokerau iwi chairs, told us that iwi must have early, meaningful and ongoing opportunities to help shape the design of any future local government arrangements for Northland, and that councils must uphold their Tiriti-based relationships and obligations to iwi. They asked that a council–iwi working group be established for the detailed design phase.

Te Kahu o Taonui provided seven principles they expect decision-makers to consider in any decisions moving forward:

- He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti
- te Taiao (the environment)
- empowering our local voice with decision-making power
- rural equity to protect our small and remote communities
- affordability
- maintaining and enhancing environmental sustainability (that incorporates sustainable economic development)
- Māori input and participation with strong representation to reflect a partnership approach.

Te Rūnanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi (TRAION), representing the region's largest iwi, made a formal submission in support of a single unitary authority for Northland, on the basis that it "embeds strong, durable, and Treaty-consistent Māori representation in the governance of Te Tai Tokerau." That support is conditional. TRAION would actively oppose a unitary authority that replicates or worsens current Māori representation in the Far North, or that repeats the exclusion of Māori from local and regional decision-making that the Waitangi Tribunal found in Wai 1040.

Their position rests on five foundations:

- Decisions about the structure of a Northland unitary authority must be anchored in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and in the findings of the Waitangi Tribunal's Wai 1040 inquiry. A model that fails to restore to Māori a voice in governance proportionate to their population does not meet the findings and recommendations of the Waitangi Tribunal.
- Any unitary authority must carry dedicated Māori ward seats in proportion to the Māori electoral population, at a minimum equivalent to the eight seats currently held across Te Tai Tokerau – four at Far North District Council, two at Whangarei District Council and two at Northland Regional Council. Those seats must sit in the founding legislation and be shielded from removal by a poll of the general roll.
- Beyond ward seats, TRAION seeks co-governance committees established in statute, holding delegated authority to make decisions on matters that bear directly on hapū and iwi.
- TRAION asks the Crown to write a local government representation redress clause into the Ngāpuhi Deed of Settlement and its settlement legislation, and to agree a safeguard that current levels of Māori representation are maintained as a minimum and built on over time, with no irreversible decisions on representation taken in Te Tai Tokerau until the Ngāpuhi settlement is complete.
- TRAION will work with hapū networks and with the other Te Tai Tokerau iwi through Te Kahu o Taonui to reach a shared regional position on Māori representation.

Te Uri o Hau Settlement Trust did not indicate a preferred model, noting that in its February 2026 submission on the Government's Simplifying Local Government proposal it had expressed opposition. Its primary concern is that reorganisation could weaken Treaty settlement arrangements, mana whenua influence and existing iwi–council relationships, and that overly centralised decision-making could reduce local representation. It saw opportunity in councils working differently to improve coordination on regional issues such as freshwater, climate adaptation, biosecurity and catchment management, and to strengthen Treaty partnerships and embed mana whenua participation through Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements.

Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa holds that a Northland-wide model is the best long-term option, but only if Māori and iwi governance is structurally embedded rather than advisory, local boards hold real authority and budgets, rural equity is legally protected, and the Far North cannot be consistently outvoted. Without those conditions, they support the Far North remaining separate. Land use planning, environmental management, local infrastructure priorities, service delivery standards, community funding, and engagement with iwi and hapū must stay local. Engagement currently occurs too late in the process and has little influence on final outcomes.

Ngāti Hine's rohe currently sits across Far North District Council and Whangarei District Council boundaries. They prefer a single unitary authority which would remove that split. Roading, te taiao, leadership and representation, and the inclusion of hapū and iwi should stay local. They want true partnership, as invited by Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

2.6.3 What we heard through council–iwi and hapū partnership committees

Te Kuaka, Far North District Council's Te Ao Māori committee, did not land on a consistent position on a preferred model, and raised that there is not yet enough detail available for some to make a fully informed decision on behalf of their hapū. What matters to them is Māori representation, meaningful hapū participation in decision-making, honouring Te Tiriti obligations, and retaining Māori wards.

Te Kārearea, Whangarei District Council's Māori standing committee, wants to remain closely involved as this work continues. The council held an informal briefing with Te Kārearea and Te Huinga (the group representing the hapū of Whangārei) to seek their feedback, followed by a formal workshop ahead of the council's decision, which informed council members' decision-making.

Te Ruarangi, Northland Regional Council's standing committee of councillors and appointed iwi and hapū members, provided direction that any future proposal must be guided by clear principles, outcomes and protections for Māori and local communities. Rather than favouring a particular structure, members took a tikanga-led approach, with strong focus on protecting and enhancing te taiao, maintaining strong local governance and Māori representation, addressing equity for rural and Māori communities, and safeguarding Treaty relationships. Members highlighted significant concerns about the compressed process, limited evidence base, and lack of opportunity for iwi and hapū engagement before key decisions and were clear that Māori need to be partners in decision-making, not just advisory.

2.6.4 The consistent message

While iwi across Northland have not landed on a single preferred option – some support a Northland-wide unitary authority, some support the Far North remaining separate, some oppose amalgamation, and some hold no position on structure – the conditions they place on any future model are consistent.

A consistent theme was that partnership must carry genuine decision-making authority, not an advisory role. Iwi sought dedicated Māori seats, statutory co-governance with delegated authority over matters bearing directly on hapū and iwi, and structurally embedded iwi governance as a condition of support for any wider model.

The protection of Māori representation was raised with similar consistency. The 2025 referendums removed four of the eight Māori seats across Te Tai Tokerau, and there was concern that any new structure should not compound that loss. Iwi sought Māori seats entrenched in founding legislation and placed beyond the reach of general-roll referenda, the retention of Māori wards, and safeguards against any further dilution of Māori representation.

Te taiao, local voice and rural equity were also recurring concerns, alongside Te Tiriti and partnership, as the things any model must protect. There was concern that reorganisation could weaken environmental outcomes and existing arrangements, and repeated warnings that smaller and rural communities risk being overlooked within a larger structure.

Underlying all of these is a shared view that there is not yet enough information for iwi and hapū to form settled positions. Iwi and hapū are being asked to form views without sufficient detail on governance, representation, assets or financial impact. This reflects the constraints of the Government timeframe.

3. Strategic case for change

3.1 Northland context

3.1.1 Historical and constitutional context

Te Tai Tokerau occupies a unique place in the constitutional history of Aotearoa New Zealand as the birthplace of both He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These foundational documents continue to shape relationships between Māori and the Crown and inform the context within which local government operates. For many iwi and hapū of Te Tai Tokerau, He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti are inseparable constitutional foundations that continue to shape the relationships with council, local government and iwi, hapu leaders and representatives.

3.1.2 Communities, geography and economy

Northland combines strong local identities with shared environmental, infrastructure and economic systems that operate across district boundaries. Future local governance arrangements need to support coordinated regional decision-making while also recognising the differences in communities across the region.

Northland is New Zealand's northernmost region, extending from Te Hana in the south to Cape Reinga in the north. It comprises the Far North, Whangārei and Kaipara districts, which together form the Northland regional council area. The region covers approximately 13,288 square kilometres and includes a dispersed network of urban, rural, coastal and remote communities.

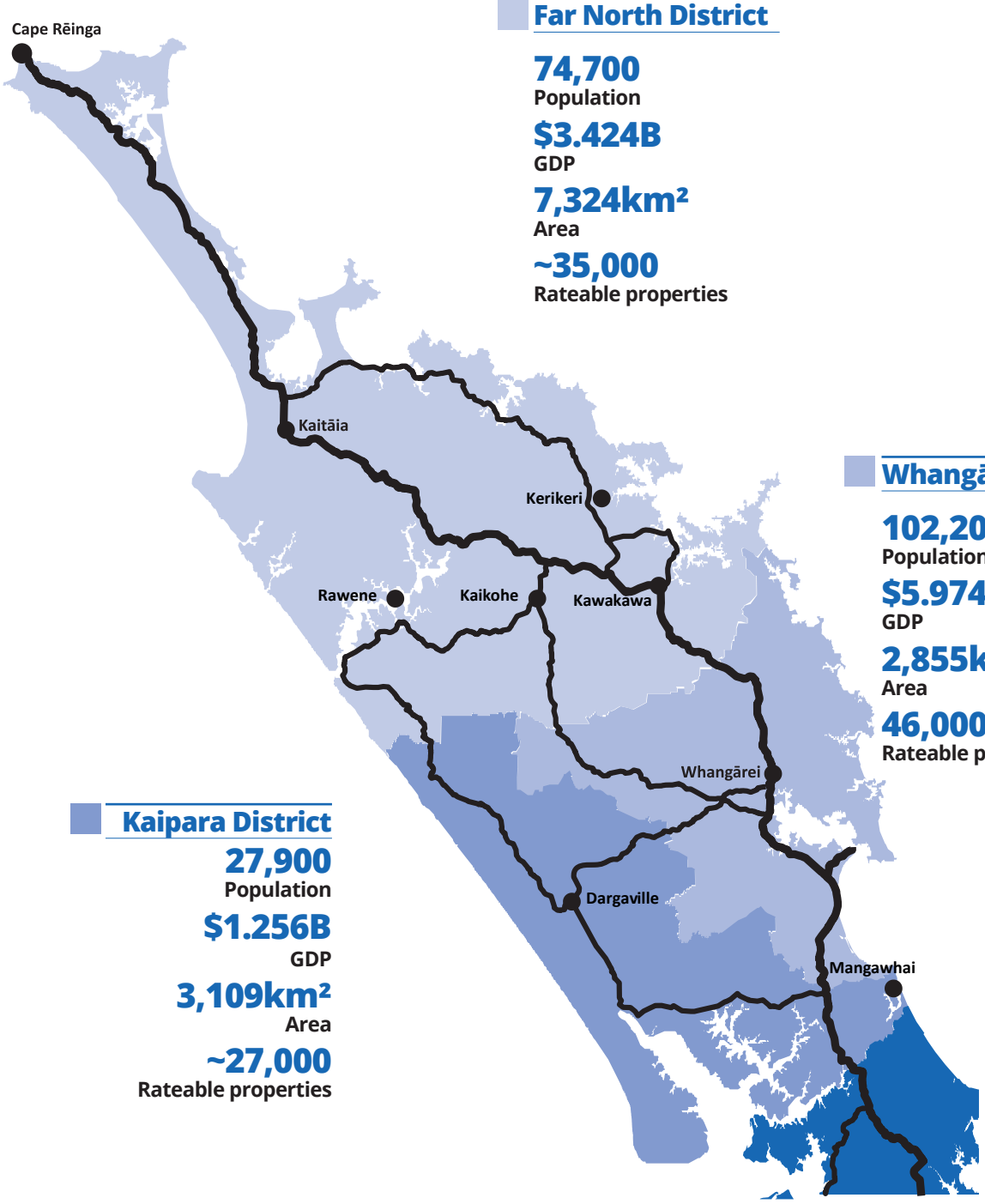
Northland's communities have distinct local identities and circumstances, but many of the systems that support them operate at a regional scale. The region operates as a single civil defence and emergency management area, a single regional planning area and a single environmental management region. Its river catchments, freshwater systems, indigenous biodiversity, flood management schemes and coastal environments extend across territorial authority boundaries and require coordinated management.

The same is true of several important infrastructure and economic systems. Whangārei is the region's primary employment and service centre, with important infrastructure and economic activity around Marsden Point and Northport. The Far North has a strong primary industry and tourism base, while Kaipara has a significant agricultural base and growing links to both Whangārei and Auckland. These links create opportunities for coordinated regional planning, while also reflecting the different needs and priorities of Northland communities.

These characteristics are important when considering future local government arrangements. Northland is not a single uniform community, nor is it three completely separate districts. The region combines strong local identities with shared environmental, infrastructure and economic systems. Effective governance must be capable of addressing region-wide issues while also recognising the different circumstances, priorities and identities of communities across the region.

Figure 11
Northland at a glance

Northland districts – key statistics



Far North District

74,700
Population

$3.424B
GDP

7,324km²
Area

~35,000
Rateable properties

Whangārei District

102,200
Population

$5.974B
GDP

2,855km²
Area

46,000
Rateable properties

Kaipara District

27,900
Population

$1.256B
GDP

3,109km²
Area

~27,000
Rateable properties

Travel times

Kaitāia to Dargaville	**2:15**
Mangawhai to Kaikohe	**2:00**
Whangārei to Rawene	**1:45**
Mangawhai to Cape Rēinga	**4:30**

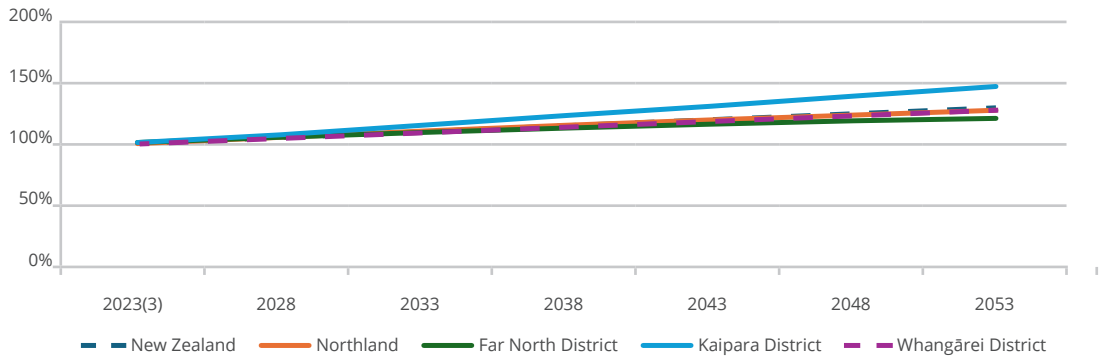
3.1.3 Diversity across Northland

While Northland shares many regional systems and challenges, its communities are diverse. The figures below illustrate some of the demographic, social and growth differences across the region, and between Northland and New Zealand as a whole.

Growth and change - Growth is projected across all parts of Northland, but at different rates, reflecting different development patterns and future infrastructure demands across the region.

Figure 12

Population growth projections (2023-2053)



Community characteristics - The proportion of residents identifying as Māori varies across Northland, reflecting the distinct histories and communities that make up the region. The balance between urban and rural populations varies considerably across Northland's districts, while the overall regional population is nearly split evenly between rural and urban communities.

Figure 13

Māori / non-Māori populations

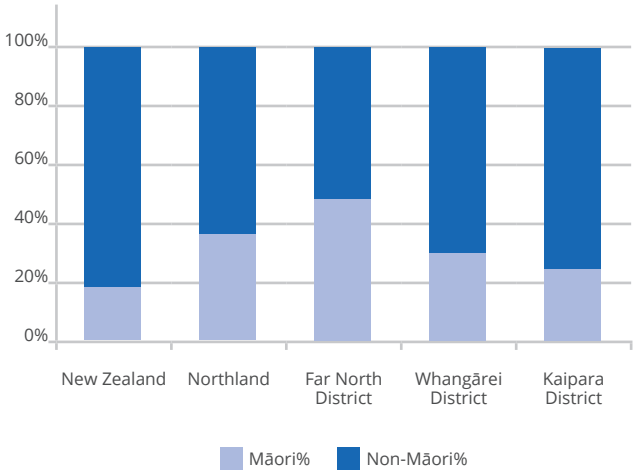
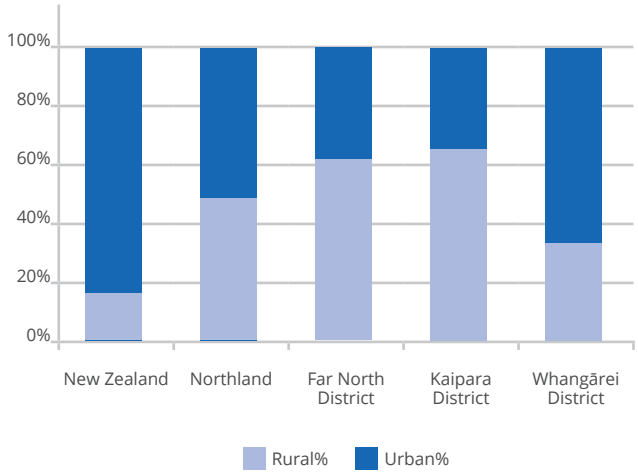


Figure 14

Urban and rural populations



Social and economic diversity[2] - Social and economic circumstances differ across Northland. Measures of deprivation vary between districts, while each district has a distinct mix of industries and economic strengths. Together, these factors highlight the need for governance arrangements capable of responding to different local circumstances while supporting coordinated regional decision-making.

2 'Owner-occupied property operation' has been excluded from StatsNZ information on GDP by industry for this analysis.

Figure 15
Population profile by deprivation index

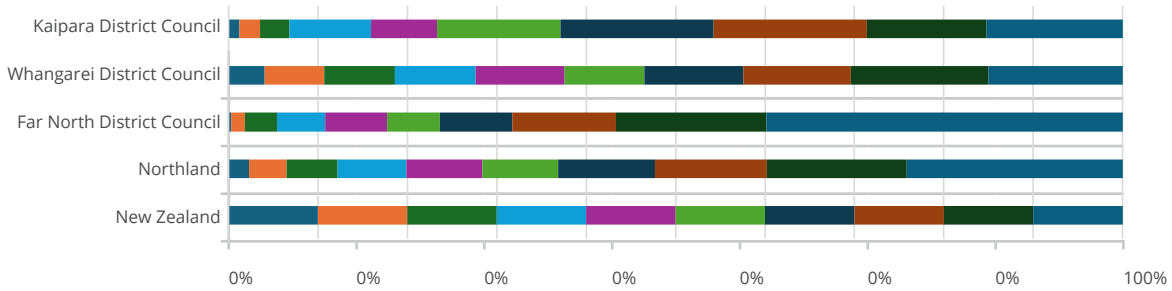
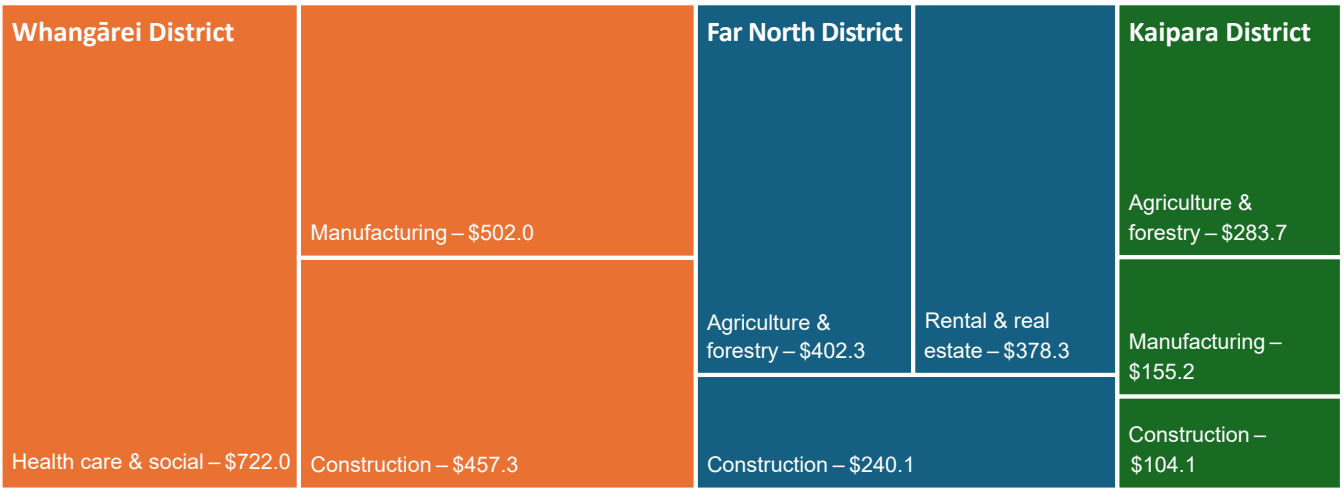


Figure 16
Top three industries by GDP ($M)



3.1.4 Current arrangements

Governance

Northland's councils have adopted different approaches to representation, local decision-making and community participation, reflecting the diversity of communities across the region. The Far North District Council, Whangarei District Council and Kaipara District Council each operate with different governance structures, representation models and mechanisms for engaging with local communities and Māori. As a result, there is no consistent approach to local representation across Northland. The current arrangements are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of current governance models

District or Regional Council	Māori Wards[3]	Community Boards	General Wards	Number of Councillors	Population per Member
Far North District	Yes (1)	Yes (3)	Yes (3)	10	7360
Whangārei District	Yes	No	Yes (5)	13	7742
Kaipara District	No	No	Yes (3)	8	3355
Northland Regional	Yes (1)	-	Yes (7)	9	22,344

3 The Māori wards for Whangarei District Council and Northland Regional Council will cease at the next local government elections in 2028.

Key observations are outlined below.

- Representation ratios vary across the region. Far North District Council and Whangarei District Council provide broadly similar population representation per elected member, while Kaipara District Council has a significantly lower population-per-member ratio.
- Far North District Council currently has three community boards providing a link between local communities and the Council, representing and advocating for local interests, providing input on matters affecting their communities, maintaining oversight of Council services in their area, and making recommendations to Council on local priorities and spending. These are comprised of:
  - The Bay of Islands-Whangaroa Community Board has seven members elected from six subdivisions.
  - The Kaikohe-Hokianga Community Board has six members elected from three subdivisions.
  - The Te Hiku Community Board has six members elected from four subdivisions.
- Northland Regional Council's constituency boundaries do not align directly with district boundaries, reflecting the different role of regional governance and the regional communities of interest it represents.
- There is no consistent regional approach to Māori representation. Far North District Council, Whangarei District Council and Northland Regional Council each held referendums on Māori wards during the 2025 representation review process. The outcomes of those referendums mean that Māori wards will continue in Far North District Council, while Māori wards in Whangarei District Council and Northland Regional Council will cease from the 2028 local government elections. Kaipara District Council does not currently have a Māori ward.

The differing approaches to community boards, Māori wards and local representation mean communities currently experience different pathways for participation and influence in local decision-making across Northland. This highlights the complexity of developing future representation arrangements across the region.

Cooperation

Northland's councils have increasingly worked together to address issues that are regional in nature. Regional collaboration is embedded across economic development, transport, emergency management, strategic planning and infrastructure delivery.

Examples include Northland NZ, Northland Forward Together, Civil Defence Emergency Management Group, Regional Transport Committee, Northland Mayoral Forum and Chief Executives Forum, development of the Northland Regional Deal proposal and most recently, the establishment of Northland Waters.

These arrangements demonstrate a strong history of cooperation and a recognition that many of Northland's opportunities and challenges are shared across the region. They also illustrate the extent to which regional outcomes currently depend on collaboration between separate organisations.

3.2 Limitations of the current arrangements

Despite a strong history of working together, there are some challenges that cannot be addressed while operating as four different councils.

The question of whether Northland's current local government arrangements are best suited to the region's future needs is not new. Between 2013 and 2017, the Local Government Commission undertook a comprehensive assessment of local government structures in Northland, including consideration of the status quo, modified governance arrangements, two unitary authorities, and a single Northland-wide unitary authority.

While the Commission did not proceed with its preferred reorganisation proposal (a single unitary authority), its investigations identified a number of enduring issues affecting the effectiveness, efficiency and long-term sustainability of local government in the region.

The Commission's analysis stated the following limitations with the status quo[4]:

- Northland faces significant socio-economic challenges and diverse community needs
- the current multi-council structure requires substantial coordination to achieve regional outcomes
- separate systems and processes create duplication and additional transaction costs
- planning and regulatory functions would benefit from greater consistency and integration
- scale and capability constraints exist, particularly in specialist and technical functions

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- key regional functions, including infrastructure planning, environmental management and resource management, increasingly require coordinated decision-making across boundaries
- while collaboration between councils has improved significantly, achieving and maintaining regional outcomes continues to depend on sustained commitment, relationships and resourcing.

Many of these issues remain relevant today, though since the Commission's investigations, collaboration between Northland's councils has strengthened and a number of successful regional initiatives have been established. However, the proposed planning framework's emphasis on regional spatial planning, integrated infrastructure planning and coordinated implementation, increases the importance of addressing the governance, planning and coordination challenges previously identified.

The supporting councils consider that these factors strengthen the case for moving toward a governance arrangement that is capable of supporting both effective regional decision-making and strong local representation.

3.3 Benefits of Head Start

The Head Start pathway enables Northland to take a locally led approach to governance reorganisation while maintaining a clear commitment to the establishment of a single Northland unitary authority.

It provides an opportunity for Northland to begin the important work, collaboratively with communities, iwi and hapū, and central government, to design the representation, governance, and financial delivery arrangements that will support long-term success. In parallel, opportunities for operational alignment can be explored and implemented during the Transition Period, mitigating the delay in realising benefits compared to moving to the Destination Model straight away.

Given the significance of these decisions and their impact on communities across the region, Northland considers that a structured transition pathway provides the greatest opportunity to build confidence, reduce implementation risk and establish a durable reorganisation outcome.

By initiating work on this programme early, Northland is better positioned to work with central government on developing and delivering a Regional Deal to further support progress in the region.

4. The path to a single Northland unitary authority

4.1 The Destination

4.1.1 Benefits of the proposed governance model

This Outline Proposal supports the establishment of a single unitary authority, supported by local governance bodies, as the long-term governance model for the region. The proposed model combines region-wide responsibility for planning, infrastructure, environmental management and service delivery with meaningful local governance bodies, ensuring local communities continue to be represented in decisions affecting their area. This approach seeks to capture the benefits of integrated regional governance while maintaining strong local representation and community connection.

This conclusion is consistent with the findings of the Local Government Commission's consideration of Northland reorganisation. In 2013, the Commission identified a single Northland unitary authority as its preferred governance model[5], citing stronger regional leadership, integrated planning and infrastructure management, reduced reliance on voluntary collaboration between councils, and a more sustainable organisational scale. The Commission concluded that a single Northland-wide structure provided the strongest platform for addressing issues that affected the region as a whole.

The Head Start assessment reached a similar conclusion. It found that the Destination Model provides the strongest alignment with the objectives of the Head Start process, including simplified governance arrangements, clearer accountability for regional outcomes, and the strongest long-term alignment with the direction of the future planning system. By bringing regional and district functions together within a single organisation, it strengthens the connection between planning, funding and delivery decisions and provides the strongest platform for addressing issues that affect Northland as a whole.

The key benefits identified through the Head Start process are summarised in the table below.

Table 3
Benefits of the Destination Model

Model feature	Benefit
Integrated regional governance	Aligns planning, infrastructure, investment and environmental management within a single organisation.
Local representation	Maintains a visible and locally focused layer of representation focused on local priorities, communities of interest and place-based decision-making.
Clear accountability	Creates a single point of accountability for regional outcomes and reduces reliance on coordination between multiple councils.
Regional leadership	Provides a single Northland-wide voice for advocacy, economic development and engagement with central government.
Combined regional and local decision-making	Balances region-wide coordination with local input, helping ensure decisions are made at the most appropriate level.
Organisational capability	Creates greater depth of expertise, workforce resilience and ability to deploy specialist capability across the region.
Future planning system	Provides the strongest alignment with the direction of the emerging planning system and regional planning requirements.

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4.1.2 Description of governance, funding and service delivery

The proposed governance model is summarised in Table 4. It describes how governance, funding and service delivery would operate under a single Northland unitary authority supported by local governance bodies.

Table 4
Key workings of Northland unitary authority

Aspect	Description
Governance	**1. This is a single unitary authority for the whole region.** One governing body holds the full democratic mandate for both regional and territorial government functions. **2. A local representation layer is included to maintain community representation.** Local bodies sit beneath the unitary authority to represent communities of interest. They are assumed to have defined decision-making powers for place-based matters, with the detailed arrangements to be established through legislation. **3. Decision-making is shared between the governing body and local representation layer** The governing body focuses on region-wide priorities and outcomes, while local bodies provide decision-making and oversight for matters affecting their communities.
Funding	**4. There is a single funding and rating system.** The council has a single Financial Strategy that aligns its approach to debt, rates, investment, borrowing and financial sustainability across the region. **5. Service levels are set either regionally, or vary with local body input** Service levels may be set regionally or vary with local body input. Funding reflects the level of service being delivered, with targeted rates used where appropriate to support local variation.
Service Delivery	**6. All services are delivered through one organisation.** Planning, infrastructure, environmental management, and local services are managed within a single organisational framework. Staff, systems, and delivery capability are consolidated into a single council organisation. **7. Service delivery is coordinated across the region with local variation achieved through delegation.** Decisions on infrastructure, investment, and delivery are made with a full regional perspective. Services can be tailored to communities through decisions made by local bodies within their delegated scope.
Requires bespoke legislation?	Yes. While the establishment of the unitary authority itself is unlikely to require bespoke legislation, once the design of the local governance bodies has been agreed, bespoke legislation will be required to establish those arrangements and provide for their powers, responsibilities and decision-making role.

The supporting councils recognise that the success of any future Northland governance model will depend not only on the structures that are established, but on the extent to which those arrangements reflect the expectations of communities, iwi and hapū, and elected members.

Feedback received through the reorganisation process has identified a number of matters that communities and stakeholders consider important, including strong local representation, meaningful community influence, Māori participation, rural equity, affordability, service levels, and fair access to investment and resources. These considerations are expected to inform the detailed design of future governance arrangements and provide an important foundation for the next phase of work.

4.2 Challenges of moving directly from status quo to one unitary authority[6]

While there is a compelling case for change, there are also a number of significant issues that will need to be addressed before any new governance structure can be successfully implemented. These issues are not unique to Northland, but are amplified by the region's size, diversity, and existing governance arrangements as shown in Section 3.

The diversity of Northland's communities makes the challenges described below more complex to resolve and creates legitimate questions about the future form and operation of a unitary authority structure.

Moving directly to amalgamate all four councils into one would require resolving these issues within a relatively short timeframe and in a challenging environment of meeting deadlines for the new planning system, the establishment of the Northland Waters, and the numerous other changes local government are managing.

4.2.1 Māori representation and partnership arrangements

Northland currently has different approaches to Māori representation. Far North District Council's Māori ward will continue following the 2025 referendum, while Māori wards in Whangarei District Council and Northland Regional Council will cease from the 2028 elections. Māori also make up significantly different proportions of the population across the region.

In addition, Northland's councils currently operate through a myriad of different Māori representation, partnership, governance, and engagement arrangements. These include existing Treaty settlement obligations, statutory arrangements, committee structures, relationship agreements, and council-specific approaches to working with iwi and hapū. Section 5.4.3 and Section 6 of this Outline Proposal expand on these arrangements. Determining how these arrangements would be carried forward, aligned, or accommodated within the Destination Model will require careful consideration and engagement.

The design of the Destination Model will need to address differing views on how Māori representation and participation should be reflected, including the role of Māori representation, partnership arrangements, Treaty settlement obligations, and opportunities for iwi and hapū participation in regional and local decision-making within a single Northland-wide council.

Resolving these matters will be important to maintaining public confidence in future governance and representation arrangements across Northland.

4.2.2 Local representation and allocation of decision-making powers

While there is broad agreement that local representation should remain a feature of any future governance arrangement, the design of future representation arrangements has not yet been worked through with communities, iwi and hapū. Matters such as the structure of local representation, the allocation of decision-making powers between regional and local governance, and the mechanisms through which communities influence decisions have not yet been considered in detail.

Key matters requiring further consideration include the extent to which decision-making should be devolved to local governance bodies, what form those entities should take, how local communities can meaningfully influence decisions that affect them, and how future arrangements can recognise the distinct character and needs of Northland's diverse urban, rural, remote, iwi and hapū communities. This is more challenging than determining which functions should be regional and which should be local. Within most council functions, decisions are made at multiple levels and affect communities in different ways. Developing a model that provides meaningful local influence over the decisions that matter most to communities will require careful design and engagement.

These conversations are particularly important in Northland given the diversity of communities across the region and the differences in current representation arrangements where community boards are an established part of the Far North but not in Whangārei or Kaipara.

The goal, however, is to strengthen local democracy so that it improves public trust, participation in local government, and builds a foundation for active participation.

6 These include common themes raised in earlier sections of this report and Far North District Council's Conditions for LG Reform briefing paper.

4.2.3 Allocation of investment, services and organisational resources

Important questions remain regarding how future investment decisions should be made and what constitutes a fair allocation of resources across Northland. Factors raised include population, geography, deprivation, growth, network size, and rural and urban priorities. Determining how these and other considerations should be reflected in future funding and investment frameworks will be an important part of designing the Destination Model.

A single Northland-wide council would require agreement on how infrastructure investment, service levels, economic development activity, organisational resources and regional assets are managed across the region. As shown in Section 3, Northland's districts differ significantly in their population, geography, growth pressures, levels of deprivation, infrastructure needs and existing service delivery arrangements. These differences create legitimate questions about how future investment priorities would be determined, how local needs would be reflected in regional decision-making, and how communities across the region would share in the benefits of a larger organisation.

Future arrangements will need to provide confidence that communities both contribute to and benefit from regional decision-making in a fair and transparent way. This includes how investment priorities are determined, how regional resources are allocated, and how differences in existing service levels, infrastructure needs and community priorities are managed within a single organisation. Resolving these matters will be important to building confidence that a future Northland-wide council will operate in the interests of the region as a whole.

4.2.4 Affordability and distribution of financial impacts

The future governance model will need to balance a number of competing considerations, including future service levels, local service access, affordability and the balance between regional consistency and local responsiveness. Determining how future governance arrangements can maintain or improve service delivery outcomes while remaining affordable and financially sustainable will be a key consideration.

Northland's councils currently operate with different debt levels, rating structures, funding approaches, financial strategies, FAR rates and service levels. Moving to a single council would require agreement on how future rates, debt, service levels, investment priorities and regional assets are managed, and how the benefits and costs of reform are shared across the region. A further challenge is that the evidence for direct financial savings from council amalgamations is mixed, while public expectations are often focused on lower rates and improved value for money.

Any future arrangement would need to provide a transparent and well understood approach to managing differences in debt, rates, assets, service levels and investment priorities, and clearly demonstrate how costs and benefits are shared across the region.

4.2.5 Community support for a single unitary model

Preliminary community feedback gathered during the Head Start process, as shown in Section 2.5, identified support for many of the outcomes that local government reorganisation is intended to achieve. Across the region, participants consistently identified a simpler and less duplicated system, lower costs, and stronger ability to manage growth, infrastructure and regional planning as potential benefits.

Though these outcomes align closely with the strengths identified through the assessment of a single Northland unitary authority, the single Northland-wide council model did not receive majority support from participants. In each district, support for a single Northland-wide council sat between roughly a quarter and a third of respondents.

Community feedback also highlighted concerns about local voice, community influence, the potential impacts on smaller communities, and whether the anticipated benefits of reform would be realised in practice. While these concerns were not specifically related to the single unitary authority model, they are particularly relevant in Northland, where communities range from Whangārei's urban centre to small rural, coastal and remote settlements across the Far North and Kaipara, and nearly half the region's population is rural.

Notably, in 2013 the LGC's consultation on their preferred option was opposed by 90.3% of 1,894 submissions, citing a preference for the status quo and concerns around loss of voice for smaller communities. While the preliminary community feedback suggests attitudes towards reform may have shifted since 2013, concerns around the loss of local voice continue to be a significant issue.

These findings suggest that building confidence in future representation arrangements may be as important to the success of reform as the choice of governance structure itself.

4.3 The Transition Period

4.3.1 Benefits of a Transition Period

A Transition Period is proposed because it allows Northland to begin local government reorganisation before 2028, while also creating time to address the complex governance, representation and financial issues that will influence the long-term success of a single Northland unitary authority.

The table below summarises the key benefits of transitioning from four councils to two unitary authorities before progressing to a single Northland unitary authority.

Table 5
Benefits of the Transition Model

Benefit of Transition Period	Why it matters
Realising early benefits of reorganisation	Establishing two unitary authorities immediately reduces the number of councils in Northland from four to two, simplifying governance arrangements and reducing duplication, allowing some of the benefits of reorganisation to be recognised before the single unitary authority is fully designed.
Progressive alignment towards the Destination Model	Once established, the Transition Period enables the two unitary authorities to progressively assess and align where practical service delivery approaches, customer experience, asset management approaches and organisational systems. There is a substantial amount of work involved in aligning council processes and practices following an amalgamation. Using the Transition Period to commence this work, increases the economies of scale of the two unitary model over time and positions the future unitary authority to realise the benefits of integration more quickly when it is eventually established.
Reduced transition risk for the final unitary authority	The future unitary authority is created from two councils that have already aligned many of their approaches, reducing the scale and complexity of the final transition.
Reduced implementation risk before 2028	The period leading up to the 2028 local government elections already includes implementation of the new planning system, establishment of Northland Waters, the potential introduction of rates capping legislation and other significant changes affecting local government. Establishing a Whangārei–Kaipara unitary authority and a Far North unitary authority and retaining regional functions through the Shared Regional Entity is a simpler and more achievable programme of work than integrating all four councils into a single organisation before 2028.

While the transition to two unitary authorities delivers immediate benefits, the additional time created by the Transition Period also provides significant opportunities to address some of the more complex issues identified in Section 4.2.

The table below summarises how this additional time can be used to improve the design, implementation of a future Northland unitary authority, improving the likelihood of future success.

Table 6

Benefits of additional time to design single unitary model during Transition Period

Area	Why it matters	How the Transition Period addresses the concern
Local governance and local voice	Communities want confidence that local priorities and local decision-making will continue to be reflected in future governance arrangements.	Allows for mindful development of a strong local governance layer that reflects Northland's diverse communities and provides meaningful local influence over local decisions where they matter most. Greater opportunities for community involvement in development of future arrangements can improve community confidence.
Māori representation	Future arrangements need to be durable, regionally workable and capable of meeting the needs of Northland's diverse communities, iwi and hapū.	The Transition Period allows each council to honour the outcomes of their 2025 Māori ward referendum. It also provides time for councils, iwi, hapū and communities to work through how Māori representation should be reflected within a future Northland-wide governance structure and develop arrangements capable of supporting the long-term success of the unitary authority and Northland's diverse communities.
Financial integration	Future arrangements for rates, debt, assets, funding and investment require careful consideration and public confidence.	Reform may result in changes to rating structures and the distribution of costs across the region, creating potential impacts for households and businesses that will need to be carefully understood and communicated. Financially sensitive policies and strategies may be aligned over time during the transition, avoiding sudden changes for both councils and households. The Transition Period also provides an opportunity to identify efficiencies and develop a transparent approach to managing any redistributed costs or benefits arising from amalgamation.
Service delivery	Communities currently experience different levels of service.	Decisions relating to future levels of service have a direct impact on costs. The transition is an opportunity to identify where there is benefit in aligning levels of service and where levels should remain different to reflect community priorities.
Organisational readiness	Successful reform requires governance, systems and capability to be established before implementation.	Prepare organisational arrangements ahead of establishment of the unitary authority.

4.3.2 Transition workstreams and milestones

The Transition Period is expected to focus on six workstreams across two broad categories of work.

The first involves resolving the governance, representation, financial and investment matters that are fundamental to the design of a future Northland unitary authority.

The second involves progressively aligning operational practices and systems where beneficial, reducing differences between councils and supporting future integration.

Table 7
Transition Period workstreams

Gateway workstreams
The following workstreams address the challenges identified in Section 4.2 and are intended to support the design of a future Northland unitary authority: 1. Local governance - local representation arrangements, delegations and local decision-making mechanisms. 2. Māori representation - Māori representation arrangements and partnership frameworks. 3. Revenue and financing - rating structures, funding policies, debt management and financial strategy. 4. Asset management and investment planning - infrastructure planning, investment priorities, levels of service and asset management frameworks.
Progressive alignment workstreams
The following workstreams provide opportunities to progressively reduce differences between councils, improve consistency and position a future unitary authority to realise the benefits of integration more quickly: 5. Operations and service delivery – service levels (where beneficial), customer experience, processes, workforce planning and delivery models. 6. Organisational systems – systems and tools that support a smoother transition and enable more consistent service delivery over time.

Collectively, these workstreams are intended to build confidence that future governance, representation, investment and financial arrangements are understood, transparent and capable of meeting the needs of Northland's diverse communities.

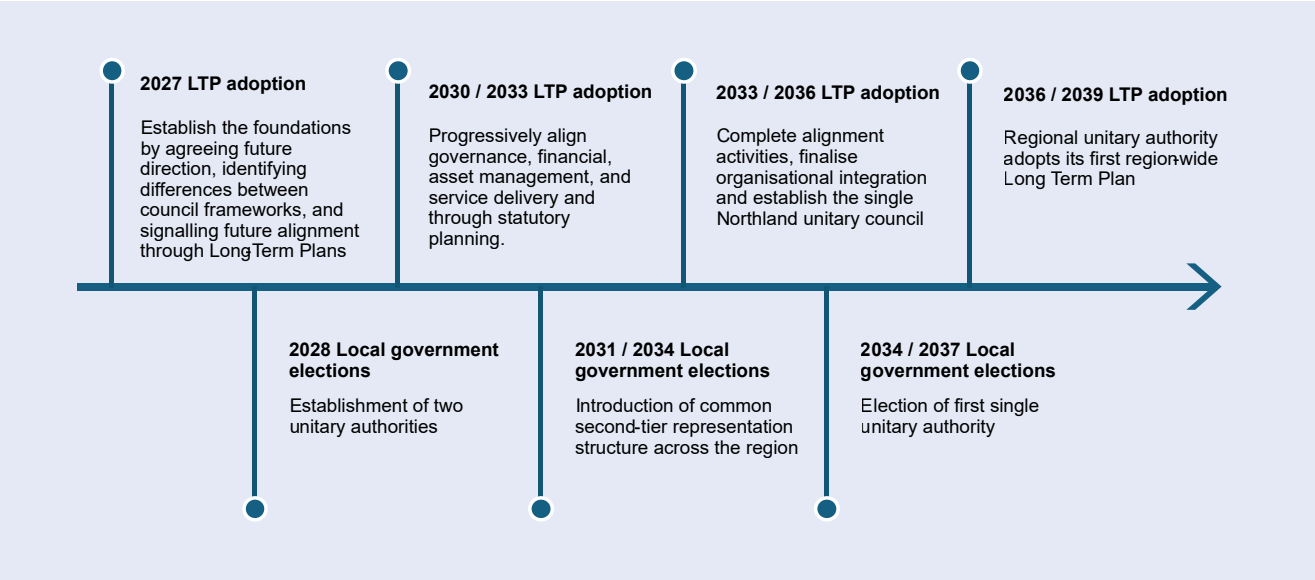
By the end of the Transition Period, the two Northland unitary authorities would have:

- agreed governance and local body representation arrangements for a single Northland unitary authority
- agreed Māori representation and partnership arrangements capable of supporting a Northland-wide governance structure
- agreed financial, rating and funding frameworks for the Destination Model
- agreed approaches to strategic assets, asset management, liabilities and long-term infrastructure investment
- closely aligned service delivery and organisational frameworks across the region
- established the legislative, organisational and governance readiness required to form a single Northland unitary authority.

Development of the Detailed Proposal will provide opportunities for continued engagement with communities, iwi, hapū, post-settlement governance entities and central government regarding the preferred transition pathway. A key part of the Detailed Proposal will be identifying the milestones and decision points through which the councils commit to the establishment of a single Northland unitary authority within an agreed timeframe. Refer also to Section 5.5 on Deliverability for a list of potential controls that may be discussed with central government during development of the Detailed Proposal, to maintain progress towards the single unitary.

The length of the transition period is proposed to be between one and three electoral cycles. An indicative timeline is shown below, sequencing these events leading up to the final transition.

Figure 17
Indicative sequence of events



4.3.3 Description of governance, funding and service delivery during the Transition Period

During the Transition Period, the Northland region would have two unitary authorities. These would be supported by a jointly controlled Shared Regional Entity for regional and cross-boundary functions. The two unitary authorities would retain democratic mandate, rating powers, and ultimate accountability to their communities. The Shared Regional Entity would provide the delivery platform for functions where fragmentation would create material inefficiency, inconsistency, or risk. It is expected that existing statutory regional functions would remain delivered at the regional scale during the Transition Period to maintain continuity of services, and minimise cost and disruption during this time-bound period.

The Shared Regional Entity is not intended to be a continuation of Northland Regional Council. Unlike a regional council, it would not have an independent democratic mandate, rating powers, or responsibility for local government outcomes across Northland. Its purpose is to provide a temporary delivery vehicle for specified regional functions during the Transition Period, while accountability remains with the two unitary authorities and reorganisation progresses towards the Destination Model.

Alternatives to the governance, funding and service delivery of the two unitary transitional model may be explored during the development of the Detailed Proposal, specifically targeting opportunities to reduce complexity and cost, being mindful that this is a transitional arrangement that will be in place for a limited time. It is also desirable to maintain existing Northland Regional Council assets at the regional scale for the benefit of the region during the Transition Period, and the preferred option to achieve this will be considered in the Detailed Proposal.

Figure 18
Option 3: Transition Model (Local bodies are indicative and do not represent the proposed numbers of local bodies)

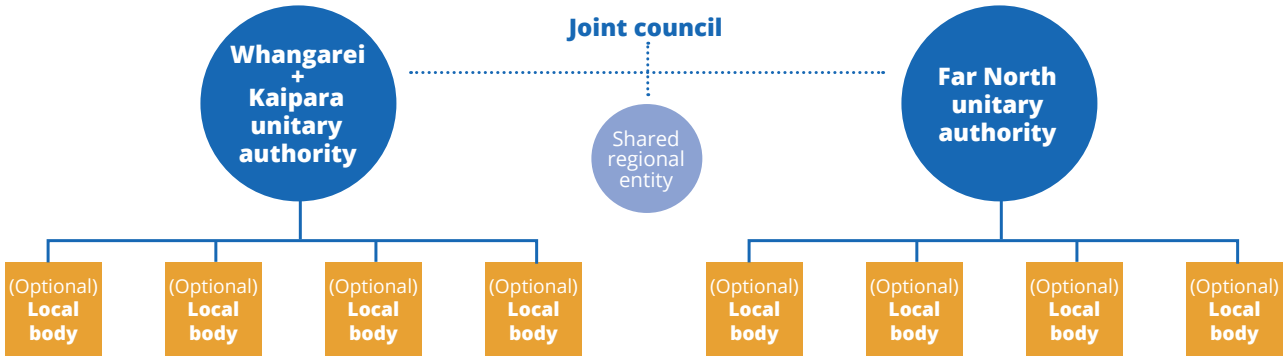


Table 8
Key workings of the Transition Model through the Transition Period

Aspect	Description
Governance	**1.** ***This is a two subregional unitary authority model. These councils hold the democratic mandate, rating powers, and ultimate accountability.*** The region would be divided into two unitary authorities, a Whangārei + Kaipara unitary authority and a Far North unitary authority. Each with its own mayor, councillors, local mandate, and responsibility for local government functions in its area. Accountability (funding ability, risk responsibility, and strategic decision-making) sits with each unitary authority for its area. **2.** ***The SRE is the mechanism that keeps the regional functions whole.*** The Shared Regional Entity would be a separate legal entity outside the two unitary authorities for a defined set of functions that are more suited to a regional approach (subject to confirmation during development of the Detailed Proposal). **3.** ***The SRE is governed by a joint council comprising elected members from both unitary authorities (plus potentially independent elected members if required).*** The SRE has its own Chief Executive, staff, systems and reports directly to a joint council of elected members from both unitary authorities. It is not governed by an external board. (The existing Joint Committee arrangement in legislation may or may not be sufficient, this proposal uses the term 'joint council' to make this distinction.) **4.** ***The SRE does not have an independent mandate.*** The joint council governs the SRE in the collective interest of the region, not as a forum for individual council mandates. A key design principle is that the two councils continue to be the bodies that communities elect, that set rates, and that remain politically answerable for outcomes. **5.** ***Local bodies may sit under either or both unitary authorities*** During the transition, each unitary authority would determine its own arrangements (including the status quo) being mindful that this is a transitional arrangement and that alignment in local governance bodies for the single unitary authority will be required to be developed through the Transition Period. As a minimum, the Far North Unitary authority would retain Far North District Council's existing community boards through the Transition Period. **6.** ***All existing CCOs remain in place through the Transition Period.*** The Northland councils operate a range of individual and joint CCOs and CCTOs. The default position for each of these entities would be the status quo during the Transition Period. I.e. Ownership of each district council's individually owned CCO's would transfer to the equivalent unitary authority, Joint CCO's would remain jointly owned by both unitary authorities. Northland Waters would continue on its current establishment pathway.
Funding	**7.** ***Each unitary authority retains its own rating powers.*** Funding for local services and priorities is determined separately within each council. Each unitary authority has its own rating structures and sets rates for its area, including the required funding required for the SRE. **8.** ***Funding for the SRE has to be guaranteed during the Transition Period and not renegotiated each year.*** A durable model needs a binding funding framework. Using the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act as a precedent, the funding formula may either be prescribed in legislation or set in the SRE's founding documents for the Transition Period.

Aspect	Description
Service Delivery	**9.** ***In a transition arrangement, the activities delivered by the SRE will likely be those currently delivered by the Northland Regional Council.*** Given the transition is for a fixed period of time, and under the Destination Model all regional functions would be delivered regionally again, there is no benefit in reorganising activities between the regional and subregional levels during the Transition Period. The Northland Regional Council already have the capability and capacity to deliver the regional functions including transport planning and catchment management. Continuing to deliver these regionally until the single unitary authority was formed would remove any disruption from a two-phase transition and allow these activities to be incorporated directly into the single unitary authority. **10.** ***District council activities would stay with the two unitary authorities (or be delegated to local bodies) unless there is a compelling reason otherwise.*** Local roads, parks, libraries, local facilities, local bylaws, local service levels, local rates decisions, and other place-based services would generally remain with each unitary authority. Clear statutory or formal arrangements for delegations, funding, accountability, and decision making would be required between a unitary authority and its local governance bodies.
Requires bespoke legislation?	Yes. For the model to function effectively, a small number of design requirements must be in legislation and supporting instruments. • A joint council of elected members from the participating unitary authorities must exist to govern the SRE. • Participation by the relevant unitary authorities must be compulsory. There must be no unilateral right to opt out of the SRE. • The purpose of the SRE must be clearly set out in legislation. • The entity must be a stand-alone legal body with power to employ staff, appoint a Chief Executive, and operate independently of any single council. • A binding funding framework for the SRE must be established, either in legislation or through a legislatively required formula embedded in a statutory plan or founding document. • Funding obligations must be enforceable and must not depend on annual negotiation. • Legislation to provide for the powers, responsibilities and decision-making role of the local governance bodies will be required during the Transition Period to support their implementation and development.

4.4 Trade-offs and challenges of the transition approach

The proposed transition pathway involves a deliberate trade-off. It accepts a longer overall period of reform in exchange for a more gradual and managed pathway to a single Northland unitary authority.

The transition model does not remove the need for organisational change. Establishing a Whangārei–Kaipara unitary authority will still require effort to align governance arrangements, organisations, systems and services. A Far North unitary authority and SRE must also be established with supporting legislation. The cost and effort associated with addressing this process should not be underestimated. The subsequent transition to a single Northland unitary authority will require a further phase of alignment across governance, representation, planning, financial and organisational arrangements. Careful planning and design of the two unitary transitional model with the single unitary model in mind will be required to minimise duplication.

A direct transition from four councils to a single unitary authority would complete reform quicker and potentially

at a lower overall cost, though transition costs have not yet been modelled. However, this would also require the full design of local governance arrangements, Māori representation arrangements, financial integration, and the organisational integration of the four existing councils into a single organisation to occur within a condensed programme of change.

The participating councils consider that this would place considerable pressure on councils, communities, iwi and hapū at the same time that significant changes are occurring within the wider planning framework and other changes in local government. The preference is to deliver a simpler transition to two unitary authorities in this condensed period ahead of the 2028 elections.

The proposed pathway provides additional time to work through the complex issues in a structured way, reduces the implementation risk prior to the 2028 elections and enables the early realisation of some reorganisation benefits. While the overall reform will take longer, the scale of change occurring at any one point is reduced.

The supporting councils acknowledge that the benefits of full integration may be realised later than under an immediate transition. This can be mitigated, but possibly not eliminated, by progressive alignment occurring during the Transition Period.

On balance, however, the supporting councils consider that a staged transition provides a stronger foundation for long-term success. The additional time creates greater opportunity to build public confidence, support implementation of the new planning system, and establish a single Northland unitary authority that has been deliberately designed rather than assembled under the pressures of a compressed implementation timetable.

5. Assessment criteria

Table 9 provides a high-level overview of how the proposed destination and transition models perform against the Head Start assessment criteria relative to the status quo. While the one unitary authority generally achieves the strongest outcomes, both models are considered to meet the Head Start assessment criteria and represent an improvement on the status quo.

Table 9

Overall assessment of the Destination and the Transition models against the status quo

Assessment criteria	One unitary (Destination)	Two unitary + SRE (Transition)
Supports the new planning system	Strong alignment with the intent of the new planning system. Single planning authority with regional integrated planning and strategic infrastructure strategy, funding and delivery. No catchment fragmentation.	Simpler than the status quo for delivering new planning system. Provides continuity and reduces implementation risk by sequencing major reform programmes.
Simplifies local governance	Maximum reduction in duplication, from four councils down to one. Simplifies planning and reporting. Single body for accountability but requires carefully designed local governance bodies.	Four councils to two reduces duplication, and complexity reduces for community and other agencies. Requires ongoing coordination through the Shared Regional Entity for regional functions.
Economies of scale	Maximises the available economies of scale. Larger rating base lowers the cost to serve per household. Combining teams increases capability and provides workforce resilience. Benefits may be largely non-financial depending on detailed design decisions, particularly on representation model.	Modest economies of scale initially. Opportunities to improve economies of scale through regional collaboration and shared services as systems and processes are aligned over time. Shortens the timeframe to realise benefits of single unitary post Transition.
Maintains local voice	Designed mindfully and collaboratively, local governance bodies are the primary mechanism for maintaining and strengthening local voice in a future unitary authority.	Maintains local voice at no less than current levels, with opportunities for each unitary authority to strengthen representation arrangements during the Transition Period.

Assessment criteria	One unitary (Destination)	Two unitary + SRE (Transition)
Deliverability	The Transition Period allows for alignment of systems and processes over time, and the deliberate design of the one unitary model, to ensure that trade-offs between efficiencies and other factors are intentional and understood.	Four councils into two is a simpler initial transition than four into one. Requires bespoke legislation for the Transition Period but provides a practical and lower-risk pathway for transitioning into one unitary authority.

While the supporting councils consider that the proposal meets each of the assessment criteria, they also recognise that a number of matters remain to be worked through during the Detailed Proposal, Establishment and Transition phases. To avoid repetition, these matters are not restated throughout each assessment criterion. Instead, the activities, decisions and issues requiring further development are consolidated in Section 5.5 (Deliverability) and Section 8 (Priorities for Detailed Proposal), which should be read alongside the assessments below.

5.1 Supports the new planning system

5.1.1 Stable implementation of planning reform

The supporting councils acknowledge that implementation of the new planning system and the proposed Head Start pathway are expected to overlap. This Outline Proposal has been designed to support implementation of planning reform while minimising disruption to work already underway.

Assuming the new planning legislation is enacted in late 2026, work on Northland's first Regional Spatial Plan is expected to be well underway before any new governance arrangements are established, through the existing RM Reform Working Group and RM Reform Joint Committee. This means the initial stages of implementing the new planning system can proceed under Northland's existing local government arrangements. The supporting councils consider this reduces implementation risk by allowing work already underway to continue without disruption from organisational restructuring.

5.1.2 Continuity during the Transition Period

A significant risk to successful implementation of the new planning system is attempting to deliver planning reform, establish a new water services organisation, undertake local government reorganisation, and resolve major questions about representation, funding and governance at the same time as addressing affordability concerns and the prospect of a rates cap.

The proposed Transition Period reduces this risk by separating these activities into manageable stages.

Planning reform can continue under existing arrangements through to 2028. Following the 2028 local government elections, regional planning functions would continue to be delivered through the Shared Regional Entity (subject to confirmation through the Detailed Proposal).

This allows regional planning capability, systems and institutional knowledge to remain together during the Transition Period and allows the region to continue to operate as one planning region, despite the region temporarily operating as two unitary authorities.

Subject to development of the Detailed Proposal, the Shared Regional Entity would provide continuity for the functions listed in Attachment 1, including:

- regional spatial planning
- natural environment planning
- catchment management
- environmental monitoring
- regional transport planning
- biosecurity and biodiversity
- civil defence and emergency management functions.

5.1.3 Long-term alignment with the new planning system

Once established, a single Northland unitary authority would provide a strong long-term governance platform for the new planning system.

The Destination Model would bring regional and territorial planning functions together within one organisation. Responsibility for regional spatial planning, natural environment planning, infrastructure planning, land use planning, resource consenting, environmental management and implementation would sit within a single organisation. This supports a stable regional spatial planning process by reducing the number of organisations involved and by minimising the risk that planning priorities, funding decisions and delivery programmes become misaligned over time.

Northland already functions as a single environmental and planning region. River catchments, freshwater systems, flood management schemes, coastal environments, transport corridors and many economic systems operate across current district boundaries. A single unitary authority would provide one organisation responsible for both regional and local planning outcomes. The principal exception is the Kaipara Harbour receiving environment, which would continue to require cross-boundary management and coordination with Auckland.

The model would also simplify engagement with communities, iwi, hapū, infrastructure providers, developers and central government agencies by providing a single planning authority and a consistent set of planning processes across Northland. Over time, Northland could move toward a single planning framework, implementation programme and monitoring approach, which would reduce duplication and provide more consistency in planning, reporting and investment decisions.

5.1.4 Trade-offs and risks

The Transition approach delays some of the planning benefits that would ultimately be realised through a single Northland unitary authority. Initially, each unitary authority would likely develop their own Land Use Plan, which would be brought together over time under the single unitary authority.

For a period, planning decisions would continue to require coordination between two unitary authorities rather than being managed within a single organisation. The SRE could play an important role in maintaining a regional planning function and supporting a coordinated and aligned approach across the two unitary authorities.

However, those arrangements would be temporary and would operate within a single regional planning framework designed to support eventual transition to a single planning authority.

Matters to be considered through the Detailed Proposal include confirmation of the future governance and operating arrangements for the Shared Regional Entity, the allocation of planning responsibilities during the Transition Period, clarity around the role of the SRE in relation to enforcement and any associated legal action, and any legislative or administrative changes required to support continuity of regional planning functions.

5.1.5 Indicative timeline

The timeline below illustrates the expected interaction between planning reform and the proposed Head Start pathway. It shows that much of the initial implementation of the new planning system is expected to occur before the October 2028 local government elections, allowing planning reform to continue under existing arrangements while governance reform is designed and implemented. This sequencing separates two major reform programmes into manageable stages, helping maintain continuity of planning functions and capability while Northland progresses towards the Destination Model.

Figure 19
Indicative timeline of implementation of new planning system

Q4 2026	• Planning legislation enacted. • Existing councils in place.
May 2027	• Head Start moves into Establishment Phase. • Existing councils remain in place.
Q4 2027	• National policy direction and standards completed.
2027-2028	• Preparation of Northland's first Regional Spatial Plan underway, for notification by Q3 2028.
October 2028	• Local government elections elect representatives to two new unitary councils and local governance bodies as determined.
Q2 2029	• Regional Spatial Plan decisions completed by new unitary councils.
Q1 2029-2030	• Development of Natural Environment Plan and district level land use planning components progresses.
Future date	• Single unitary formed. Spatial Plan and Natural Enviornment Plan already regional. Two Land Use Plans to come together over time.

5.2 Simplifies local governance

5.2.1 Destination Model

How does the proposal simplify local government?

A single Northland unitary authority supported by local governance bodies would provide a simpler local government structure than the current arrangements by reducing the number of councils and creating a single governance framework for regional and territorial functions. Rather than four separate councils, Northland would operate through one unitary authority supported by a layer of of governance that reflect Northland's diverse communities.

This would create a simpler structure for regional planning, infrastructure investment, environmental management and service delivery, and provide meaningful opportunities for local voice and local decision-making.

The detailed form of those arrangements has not yet been determined and principles for developing them collaboratively during the Transition Period are shown in Section 5.4.4 of this proposal.

Does it improve accountability and make the governance structure easier to understand?

Yes.

Accountability exists where funding decisions, priorities and performance outcomes are all managed by one entity.

Being only one council, the model provides clear accountability to communities, businesses, iwi, hapū and central government agencies regarding which organisation is ultimately responsible for planning, infrastructure, environmental management and service delivery across Northland.

Collaborative detailed design work during the Transition Period will determine the most appropriate allocation of responsibilities and decision-making authority between the Unitary authority and the local governance bodies, with a focus on creating clear roles and responsibilities.

An important consideration is ensuring that accountability between the two governance layers is clear, and that communities can readily understand how they are represented and how decisions affecting them are made.

Does it reduce duplication and complexity?

Yes.

The Destination Model would reduce duplication across governance, planning and reporting processes that are currently undertaken by multiple councils. For example, asset management planning would shift from four council-specific approaches to a single regional framework, enabling more coordinated investment decisions and clearer prioritisation. The result is fewer parallel processes and documents, and a more streamlined, coherent planning, monitoring and reporting cycle.

The greatest reduction in complexity would occur in activities that are currently undertaken through collaboration between councils. Section 3.1.4 lists a number of the current collaborative arrangements that exist in Northland. Consolidating these activities within a single governance framework would provide a more consistent and coordinated approach across Northland.

Outside the councils themselves, individuals and businesses interacting with councils in different parts of Northland would experience less complexity through a common set of policies, bylaws and planning documents. Consistency across the region makes it easier for communities to understand the future council's requirements.

A further example of this simplification is illustrated in Section 5.2.4, which compares the number of councils, plans, policies and bylaws required under the current arrangements compared to a single Northland unitary authority.

Trade-offs and Risks

Simplifying governance at a regional level creates a risk that some communities may perceive decision-making to be more distant from local communities.

The proposal includes a Transition Period specifically to allow these issues to be worked through collaboratively and deliberately in the design of the local governance bodies, rather than under compressed implementation timeframes.

The participating councils consider that the future local representation arrangements should be informed by meaningful engagement with communities, iwi and hapū. Using engagement to help shape the representation arrangements and determine the respective roles of the governing body and local bodies, will build confidence that local voice will be important part of future governance arrangements.

5.2.2 Transition Model

How does the proposal simplify local government during the transition period?

The Transition Model would simplify local government compared with the current arrangements, in a similar manner but not to the same extent as a Northland-wide unitary authority.

The current arrangements require coordination between four separate councils with different responsibilities, governance structures and decision-making processes. The Transition Model consolidates these into two unitary authorities supported by a Shared Regional Entity.

Does it improve accountability and make the governance structure easier to understand?

Yes.

Accountability would sit with the two unitary authorities, each clearly established as the accountable body within their area. Bespoke legislation is required to define the governance and funding of the SRE to ensure that accountability exists for the regional functions during the Transition Period.

Does it reduce duplication and complexity?

Yes.

The Transition Model reduces duplication and complexity compared to the status quo, by reducing the number of councils and creating opportunities to progressively align policies, planning frameworks and service delivery approaches over time.

However, the Transition Model is more complex than the Destination Model, largely due to shared arrangements for the SRE, e.g. recommendations of the SRE needing to be adopted by both councils. In addition, over time communities may experience more complexity in local governance than if there was a single transition, particularly for the Whangarei District Council and Kaipara District Council part of the region.

5.2.3 Example: Reduction in complexity

The following table is indicative of the reduction in complexity using the adoption of the Regional Spatial Plan as an example.

Each plan in the table below represents a significant statutory process, requiring formal preparation, consultation, hearings, and approval. As the number of councils involved increases, so does the number of decision-making bodies required to approve and adopt these plans, resulting in a more complex overall process.

Table 10
Complexity in supporting the new planning system

	Status Quo	One unitary (Destination)	Two unitary (Transition)
No. of Regional Spatial Plans (RSP)	1	1	1
Councils involved in drafting RSP	4	1	2 (+ SRE)
Council resolutions required to adopt RSP (both the draft for notification & adoption of final)	8	2	4
Potential for deadlock to refer to Minister	High	Low	Medium
No. of Natural Environment Plans developed	1	1	1
No. of Land Use Plans developed	3	1	2
Action Plan frameworks	3-4 potentially	1	1 or 2

5.2.4 Example: Reduction in duplication

The following table is indicative of the reduction in documents produced based on publicly available information. Supporting documents (e.g. asset management plans, internal reporting, etc) would likely be reduced by a similar proportion.

The impact of consolidation is not limited to the number of instruments. It also materially reduces the effort required to develop, maintain, update, and consult on these documents, which under the current arrangements, are undertaken separately by each council.

Table 11

Reduction in duplication of effort[7]

Instrument	Status quo	One unitary (Destination)	Two unitary (Transition)
All statutory reports e.g. Long Term Plan + supporting documents Annual Plans + Annual Reports Pre-election reports Waste Management and Minimisation Plans + supporting documents	4 sets	1 set	2 sets, inclusive of regional information
Policies	125	35-45	70-90
Bylaws	41	18-20	30-35

5.3 Economies of scale

5.3.1 Destination Model

How will functions be effectively delivered?

The Destination Model would provide opportunities to deliver functions more effectively by reducing the need for coordination between separate councils and supporting more integrated decision-making across planning, infrastructure, environmental management, regulation and local government services.

The model would be particularly beneficial for transport planning, strategic infrastructure investment, catchment and environmental management, biosecurity, science and environmental monitoring, consenting and compliance, and economic development activities that either operate across district boundaries or require a Northland-wide approach.

How will increased economies of scale add benefits?

The greatest benefits are likely to occur in functions that rely on specialist capability and coordination across the region, such as planning, engineering, environmental management, science, procurement, asset management and policy functions.

A larger organisation may be better able to attract and retain specialist expertise in addition to combining specialists within the existing councils. This would create greater organisational resilience, reducing reliance on individual staff members, and enabling specialist resources to be pooled and applied more strategically across the region.

Anticipated benefits include:

- greater access to specialist expertise and technical capability
- improved workforce resilience and reduced dependence on key individuals
- consolidation of planning, policy and corporate support functions
- improved procurement and contract management capability
- more integrated infrastructure planning and investment decision-making
- reduced duplication of governance, reporting and administrative processes.

However, many of these benefits relate to organisational effectiveness, capability, and supporting long term decision-making rather than direct cost savings.

7 Status quo figures for policies and bylaws taken from documents published on the four councils' public-facing websites. Option ranges based on the level of duplication in those documents.

The table below explains the potential benefits across a range of areas.

Table 12
Areas where economies of scale may add benefits in the Destination Model

Area	Promoted?	Potential benefits
Improvements in asset management / stewardship	Likely	Transport, flood protection, community facilities and other infrastructure assets would be managed through a more integrated regional framework, improving alignment between infrastructure investment, land use planning and long-term asset management. Levels of asset management maturity would expect to normalise towards the council with the highest level of maturity as experience and capability are shared across the region. This improves the quality of the information future decisions are based on.
Infrastructure investment	Likely	Infrastructure priorities across Northland would be considered as a whole rather than through separate district and regional processes. This supports a more coordinated approach to funding, prioritising and delivering regionally significant infrastructure.
Enhanced effectiveness, efficiency and financial sustainability of services	Likely	Combining four councils into one organisation reduces duplication across governance and support functions and allows service costs to be spread across a larger funding base. Efficiency gains are expected to be gradual rather than transformational.
Sufficient resources	Likely	A combined workforce of approximately 1,250 staff would provide greater resilience and access to specialists than the individual organisations of the status quo. This would strengthen capability overall but particularly in specialist areas.
Plans for managing debt	Not yet assessed	Ability to create a more consistent regional approach to debt and infrastructure funding. However, detailed arrangements have not yet been developed.
Plans for council-controlled organisations	Not yet assessed	There are a number of CCO's and CCTOs among the participating councils, both individually owned and jointly owned, including Northland Waters (currently being implemented). At this stage, no decision has been made on whether any new CCOs would be required as part of the Destination Model. This will be considered through the Transition Period, alongside the future role of existing CCOs, CCTOs and joint council-controlled organisations.
Projected costs of implementing the proposed reorganisation	Not yet assessed	The costs of implementing a Northland unitary authority, through the proposed staged transition approach have not yet been quantified. Opportunities for reducing any duplication between the two transition phases is important for managing total transition costs.
Improved appetite for risk and innovation	Likely	Larger organisations typically have greater capacity to invest in specialist skills, technology, and region-wide initiatives, which would support innovation and strengthen the council's (and the region's) ability to undertake larger and more complex projects.

What are the expected financial impacts of reorganisation?

The benchmarking completed as part of the Head Start process shown in Section 5.3.3 suggests that the Destination Model has the potential to operate between 8-22%[8] more efficiently than the current arrangements based on the current activities being delivered, with the lower end of that range being more realistic. The primary financial benefits available are expected to arise from reduced duplication and more efficient deployment of resources. However, the evidence from previous amalgamations in Auckland and Sydney suggests that

8 Benchmarking is based on existing activities and does not allow for transition costs. Actual cost savings are heavily influences by the structural design and service delivery decisions of the new organisation. Refer to Section 5.3.3 for more information.

financial impacts are likely to be modest and realised over time rather than transformational.

Economies of scale do arise from spreading the fixed costs of a council across a larger population and number of ratepayers. This can improve financial sustainability by allowing fixed costs, specialist functions and regionally significant investments to be supported by a broader funding base.

The supporting councils acknowledge that the financial impacts of local government reorganisation are inherently uncertain and will depend on future decisions about service levels, investment priorities, organisational design and transition costs.

Where will efficiencies come from?

Table 13
Where efficiencies may be achieved in the Destination Model

Area	Where efficiencies may be achieved
Governance of functions	A single council would replace four separate governing bodies. This would reduce duplication in governance, strategy development, reporting, policy setting and decision-making processes.
Planning and regulatory functions	Efficiencies would come from consolidating planning, policy and regulatory functions into one organisation. Northland would move from four councils issuing and enforcing consents, licensing, and inspections to a single framework.
Emergency management	Limited direct efficiencies are expected, as emergency management functions are already coordinated at a regional level. However, the Destination Model could improve emergency management outcomes by coordinating infrastructure planning, flood protection, resilience planning, land use planning and recovery activities within one organisation.
Science, data, systems and capability	Efficiencies would arise from operating a single set of corporate systems, data platforms and business processes, rather than maintaining separate systems across four councils. The larger organisation would also support greater specialist capability and reduce reliance on individual staff or small teams.
Asset management and infrastructure investment / procurement	A single council would enable infrastructure planning, asset management and investment decisions to be made at a regional scale. Efficiencies would come from coordinated investment planning, stronger purchasing power, reduced duplication of procurement processes and greater visibility of future work programmes for suppliers and contractors.
Service delivery	Efficiencies would come from delivering services through a single organisation rather than multiple councils. Opportunities include consolidating support services, standardising business processes and procurement practices. A coordinated approach can reduce duplication, improve capability, and support broader outcomes such as local supplier participation, workforce development, and regional economic growth, while reflecting local priorities and community needs.

5.3.2 Transition Model

As the Transition Model is essentially reducing four entities to two unitary authorities plus the SRE, the potential to achieve either financial or non-financial benefits from this model is very limited.

However, if Northland were to move directly to the Destination Model, aligning systems, processes, policies, and organisational practices across the region would likely take several years, with many anticipated economies of scale only being realised progressively over that time.

During the proposed Transition Period, the two unitary authorities could commence a programme of alignment, while also working through the more complex regional challenges. This would progressively increase the benefits and efficiencies available under the Transition Model and position the future unitary authority to realise the benefits of scale more quickly than if alignment work only commenced after the Transition Period.

How will functions be effectively delivered?

The Transition Model would support the effective delivery of functions by also establishing the Shared Regional Entity to coordinate functions requiring a Northland-wide approach, preventing fragmentation.

Subject to further development in the Detailed Proposal, regional strategic planning, catchment management, transport planning and other functions requiring regional coordination would be delivered through the Shared Regional Entity. This would provide a mechanism for Northland-wide decision-making while strengthening alignment between the two unitary authorities.

However, any functions that were delivered through all three organisations would require greater coordination than the Destination Model, where regional and territorial functions are integrated within one organisation.

How will increased economies of scale add benefits?

The Transition Model is expected to deliver limited benefits through greater alignment between regional and territorial functions and modest increases in organisational scale where Whangarei District Council and Kaipara District Council combine into a single unitary. However, because most territorial functions would continue to be delivered through two organisations and many regional functions are already delivered at a Northland-wide scale in the status quo, the initial benefits would be minimal, though increasing as alignment increased.

What are the expected financial impacts of reorganisation?

Financial impacts under this model are expected to emerge progressively over the Transition Period. While immediate effects on rates and financial sustainability are likely to be limited, the transition would create opportunities to improve efficiency and capability over time, positioning the Destination Model to realise its anticipated economies of scale more quickly.

There would likely be additional transition costs due to the staged approach to the transition. Avoiding duplication in the transition process and being mindful that the Transition Model is only in place for a limited amount of time is important in minimising any additional cost.

Where will efficiencies come from?

The sources of the efficiencies would be the same as the single unitary authority.

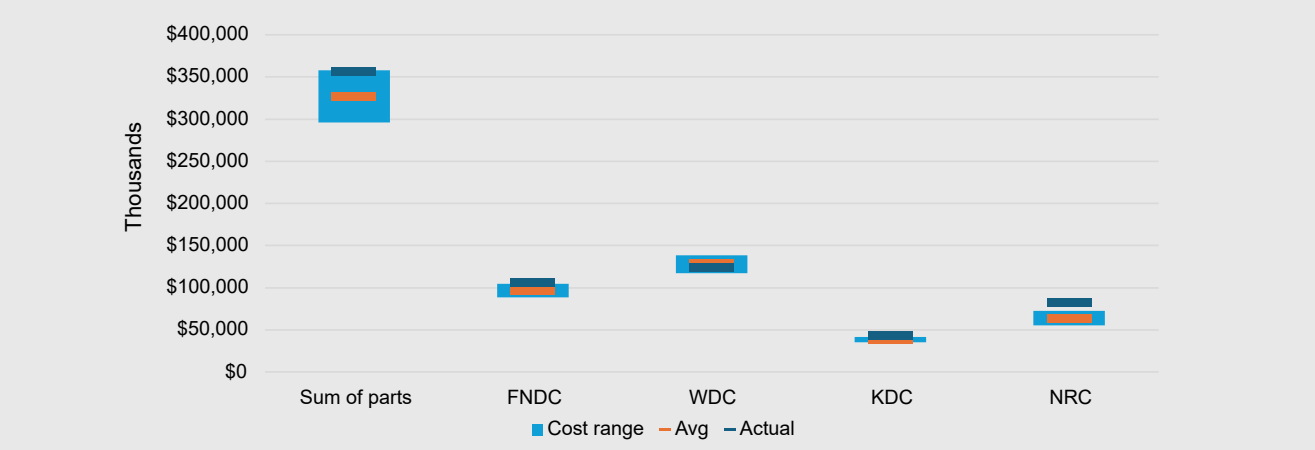
5.3.3 Financial benchmarking

To assess the potential to unlock economies of scale in the Destination Model in Northland, a benchmarking study was completed that considered the actual functional cost structures of existing local authorities across New Zealand. The benchmarking considered the different metrics that drive cost in each activity e.g. consents as a driver for Planning and Regulation, infrastructure asset value as a driver for Property, urban population as a driver for Recreation and Sport.

Individually, the four Northland councils were either within the range predicted by the benchmarking or less than 13% above the maximum range. On this basis, the benchmarking may be considered a relatively good tool for predicting an estimate of the cost of service across Northland as a region and can provide useful insights into what the Destination Model might cost.

Figure 20

Benchmarked costs compared to actual costs per council to test validity

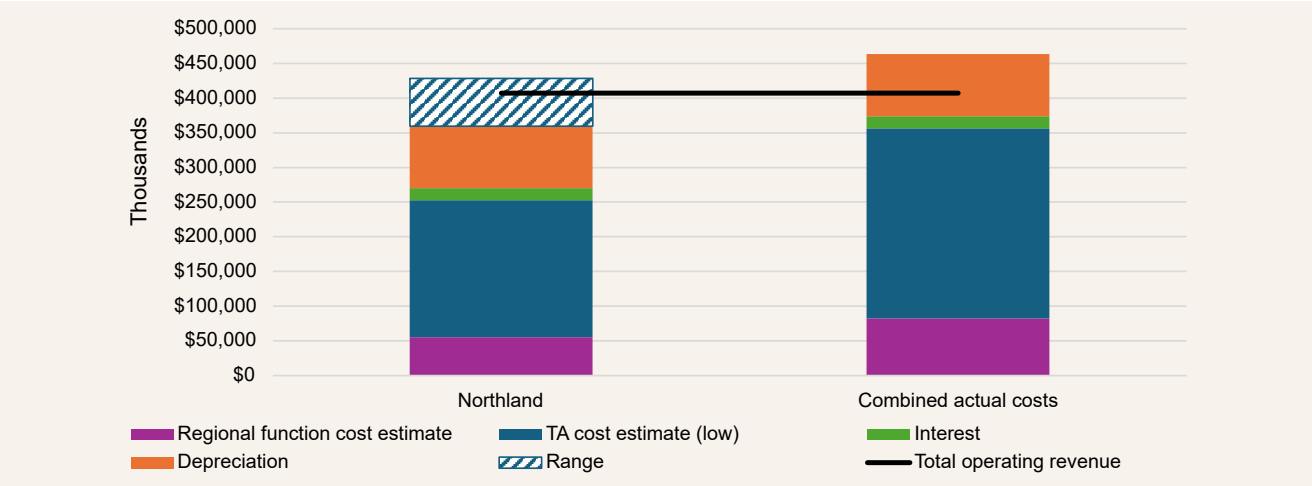


The operating costs of the four Northland councils combined were compared to a 'benchmark council' that shares the same characteristics as a combined Northland unitary authority. The results do not produce an actual operating budget or detailed cost estimate but show what a mature council that shares the same attributes as the Northland region could reasonably be expected to cost.

It indicates that the costs for a unitary authority covering the Northland region could be between 8-22% lower than the current actual costs. Based on both international evidence and Northland's current cost structure (at or slightly higher than the benchmarking average), any realised savings are more likely to sit toward the lower end of that range. The majority of these efficiencies relate to the delivery of territorial authority functions.

Figure 21

Potential costs for a Northland unitary authority versus combined rates take



Note that these benchmarks are based on the existing activities (excluding Three Waters) and have not been adjusted to allow for governance costs associated with a local governance layer, any impacts of the new planning system, and they do not allow for transition costs.

5.3.4 Example: Potential benefits of combined regional procurement

As an example, procurement is an area where benefits of region-wide delivery would be expected to occur, both financial and non-financial.

Regional collaboration on procurement began in 2024 with a working group and early development of a draft regional procurement framework. The economies of scale that the Destination Model could achieve by building on this collaboration include:

Table 14

Benefits of combined regional procurement

Benefit	Description
Reduced duplication	One authority could replace separate procurement policies, templates, supplier processes, prequalification approaches and reporting arrangements with a common regional framework. Staff, suppliers and delivery partners would spend less time navigating different council processes and more time planning and delivering outcomes.
Improved contract leverage	Aggregated demand would strengthen commercial discipline and improve whole-of-life value while preserving fair competition.

Benefit	Description
Better market visibility	A shared regional pipeline and supplier mapping would support tender readiness, compliance planning, workforce planning, subcontracting partnerships and investment decisions. Likewise, suppliers would have clearer signals about future opportunities, earlier engagement and more consistent expectations.
Stronger broader outcomes delivery	A single authority would be better positioned to consistently embed workforce, sustainability and regional economic outcomes into procurement planning and contract delivery across the region.
Major capital delivery	A unified pipeline would support better planning for transport, roading, waste, housing-related infrastructure and resilience investment. Procurement could help sequence and deliver assets, services and partnerships that strengthen Northland's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from disruption.

5.3.5 Trade-offs and risks to realising potential cost savings

From studying the financial impacts of amalgamation in Auckland, New South Wales and Queensland, the trade-offs in structural design choices that cause a reduction in the anticipated cost efficiencies in order to improve outcomes in other areas are outlined below.

Increased support requirements for the local bodies (not included in benchmarked costs)

Strengthening or introducing a local governance layer increases the onus on the unitary authority to support effective decision-making. This includes providing timely and consistent information, advice, reporting, and engagement support. These additional requirements increase organisational effort and cost, which can offset the efficiency gains achieved through consolidation.

As an indication, Auckland Council's 2025/26 Annual Plan consultation information indicates that budgets for governance costs (including elected member remuneration and council support staff) are in the order of $0.7-1.4 million per local board.[9]

Constraints on workforce consolidation and local economic impacts

Consolidating back-office roles into central locations may reduce office-related overhead costs. However, this can result in economic impacts for communities that lose those jobs. The NSW amalgamations recognised the economic impact of relocating jobs from smaller communities as a material factor. A similar issue could arise in Northland. While the Destination Model may maximise efficiency through consolidation, there are economic and social benefits to maintaining jobs across the region. This has already been identified as one of the challenges to be resolved in Northland during the Transition Period.

Aligning service levels tends to increase costs

Though this is a decision for any new entity, both Auckland and New South Wales amalgamations suggest that differences in service levels between areas are often resolved by aligning over time to the highest existing standard rather than the lowest, increasing operating costs.

The financial risks in forming a larger unitary authority are described below. These have not been quantified as part of this Outline Proposal:

Upfront transition and integration costs

Amalgamation requires significant upfront investment to integrate systems, processes, and organisations. These costs can be substantial and occur early, often offsetting any short-term efficiency gains from consolidation.

Increased organisational complexity and capability expectations

Larger organisations typically require more formalised processes, specialist roles, and governance systems to operate effectively. This can increase administrative and support costs over time, even where duplication has been reduced.

Demand and growth pressures absorb efficiency gains

In practice, any efficiencies achieved through scale may be absorbed by existing infrastructure deficits, population growth, or increased service demand. This makes it difficult to isolate and realise savings as reductions in overall costs or rates.

In Northland, the table below would suggest that staffing levels of the combined four councils are already slightly

9 Governance manual - Funding for local boardshttps://governance.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/4-roles-responsibilities-and-relationships/local-boards/funding-for-local-boards and 'Plans for your local board area' 2025/26 consultation information.

lower than similar sized councils elsewhere in New Zealand (FTE counts for the Hamilton City Council and Wellington City Council exclude any regional council functions and all FTE figures exclude CCOs).

Table 15
Comparison of Northland total FTEs

	Population	Council FTE
Whangarei District Council	100,500	407
Far North District Council	73,500	366
Kaipara District Council	26,800	164
Northland Regional Council	200,800	315
Total Combined Northland Councils	200,800	1,252
Hamilton City Council	192,100	1,316[10]
Wellington City Council	210,800	1,631[11]

5.4 Maintains local voice

5.4.1 Destination Model

Local voice includes urban, rural and remote communities, hapū and iwi participation, small and place-based communities, and the established place-based arrangements through which communities influence and make decisions on local matters.

Maintaining local voice was consistently identified as one of the most important considerations in designing any future governance model for Northland. The region's geographic scale, diverse communities, significant Māori population, urban and rural characteristics, and wide variation in social and economic outcomes mean that representation is about more than electoral arrangements.

While the structural features of a Northland unitary authority can be readily described, designing governance arrangements that communities trust is more complex. The supporting councils recognise that questions of local representation, community influence, iwi and hapū participation, delegation of decision-making to local bodies, and the voice of small or remote communities are fundamental to the long-term success of any future governance model. These are considered too important to be resolved within the Head Start timeframe for the Destination Model. This is identified as a key focus for further work during the Transition Period.

While the supporting councils have not yet agreed upon answers to these questions, there is broad agreement that maintaining local voice is critical to the success of any future governance model for Northland and that these matters require further discussion and engagement before decisions are made. An empowered local body layer of representation (e.g. via local boards or community councils) is an important matter for further exploration.

How will people elect representatives?

A range of representation arrangements could be considered as part of the detailed design process. These could include ward-based representation, at-large representation, mixed models, local or community boards, and alternative approaches to leadership selection. At this stage, no preferred approach has been identified, and further engagement and analysis would be required before decisions are made.

How will communities be represented?

The supporting councils recognise the need for the Destination Model to maintain strong connections between communities and decision-makers. The challenge is going beyond designing electoral boundaries and designing a system of local governance that communities trust, that reflects the diversity of Northland, and that ensures people continue to feel represented, heard and able to influence decisions that affect their lives. This includes both the governance arrangements of the Northland unitary authority and the design of the local governance layer through which communities influence and make decisions on local matters.

10 2024-2025 Annual Report, published by Hamilton City Council
11 2024-2025 Annual Report, published by Wellington City Council

In the context of the Destination Model, the concept of empowered local boards was considered favourably, though further work is required to determine how local decision-making powers should be exercised, how communities can influence decisions that affect them, and what form the local governance layer should take within a future Northland unitary authority.

How will iwi and hapū participate in decision-making?

Northland has a significant Māori population and a strong iwi and hapū presence. A wide range of arrangements that support their participation in local government decision-making are in place and vary between councils. These include Māori wards, relationship agreements, committee arrangements, Mana Whakahono ā Rohe, Iwi and Hapū Environmental Management Plans, and other engagement or relationship mechanisms.

Councils recognise that determining how iwi and hapū participation should be reflected within a future Northland unitary authority is a fundamental design question. A range of approaches could be considered, however there is currently no agreed position on the preferred model.

Further engagement with iwi and hapū will be required to identify arrangements that are effective, enduring and capable of reflecting the diverse aspirations of Māori communities across Northland.

Trade-offs and risks

A single Northland unitary authority has the potential to simplify governance arrangements and provide clearer regional decision-making. However, this creates a corresponding need to ensure local representation, community influence and iwi and hapū participation are not diminished as governance structures are simplified.

The principal challenge is determining how to balance regional decision-making with strong local representation and meaningful community influence. While there is broad agreement that a future unitary authority would require a strong local governance layer, the Head Start programme has not provided time for sufficient discussion on what that layer should look like or how responsibilities should be shared between regional and local decision-making structures.

The supporting councils consider these questions to be fundamental to the long-term success of any future governance model. While administrative efficiency is an important consideration, governance arrangements should also support better outcomes for Northland communities, strengthen trust in local government, and ensure all communities feel they have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their future. For this reason, further work on representation, local decision-making and Māori participation is proposed during the Transition Period before any move to a single Northland unitary authority.

5.4.2 Transition Model

The Transition Model would enable existing approaches to local representation, community boards, Māori wards, Māori participation arrangements and delegated decision-making to largely continue during the Transition Period in each of the unitaries. This would provide relative continuity for communities while allowing time for further discussion on the long-term governance arrangements required for a future Northland unitary authority.

While Far North District Council's existing community boards would continue under the Far North unitary authority, the model also provides flexibility for each unitary authority to review and further develop arrangements during development of the Detailed Proposal if desired. This may include consideration of local representation structures, community boards, Māori participation arrangements and delegated decision-making processes. However, this would need to be in consideration of the temporary nature of the Transition Model and the need to align local body arrangements in the Destination Model.

This approach reduces the need to reach immediate agreement on some of the most complex aspects of local governance reorganisation. Rather than requiring a single representation model from the outset, the Transition Model creates time to work with communities, iwi and hapū, and elected members to develop arrangements that attract broad support and are capable of reflecting the diversity of Northland.

5.4.3 Existing arrangements with iwi and hapū across the region

Beyond the Treaty settlement arrangements set out in Section 6, councils across Northland hold a range of relationship, co-governance and participation arrangements with iwi and hapū. These are not Treaty settlement arrangements, but they shape how iwi and hapū contribute to local decision-making, and how they carry into new unitary authorities would need to be worked through with iwi and hapū.

Existing Treaty settlement arrangements, partnerships, memoranda of understanding and other relationship agreements must form part of the baseline for future governance design and be maintained through the detailed design process.

Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements

Six Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements are in place across the region. Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements are participation arrangements made under the Resource Management Act:

- Northland Regional Council and Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board (December 2020)
- Northland Regional Council and Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Rēhia (December 2020)
- Whangarei District Council and Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board (December 2020)
- Northland Regional Council and Te Pouwhenua o Tiakiriri Kukupa Trust, trading as Te Parawhau ki Tai (April 2024)
- Northland Regional Council and Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Hine (December 2024)
- Far North District Council and Te Rūnanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi (August 2025).

Subject to the final design of the new planning system, it is likely that any further Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements initiated ahead of the new resource management legislation being enacted would also need to be considered.

Council–iwi and hapū partnership committees

Three of the councils work with iwi and hapū through a standing committee:

- Te Kuaka – Te Ao Māori Committee at Far North District Council
- Te Kārearea Strategic Partnership Standing Committee at Whangarei District Council
- Te Ruarangi at Northland Regional Council.

Māori wards

Māori ward arrangements differ across the four councils. Far North District Council retained its Māori ward through the 2025 referendum. The Māori ward at Whangarei District Council and the Māori constituency at Northland Regional Council were not retained and will end from the 2028 election. Kaipara District Council disestablished its Māori ward in 2024. How Māori representation would carry into any new unitary authority is a matter to work through in detailed design.

Memoranda of understanding

Far North District Council holds memoranda of understanding with iwi and hapū across its district, including:

- Ngā Manga Atawhai
- Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Hine
- Te Whiu Hapū
- Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa
- Ngāti Rēhia
- Mana Ōrite Relationship Agreement with Te Rūnanga o Whaingaroa.

Co-governance and joint management arrangements

Two co-governance and joint management arrangements provide for shared decision-making with iwi and hapū.

- The Taharoa Domain Governance Committee brings together Kaipara District Council, Te Roroa Whatu Ora Trust and Te Kuihi hapū to provide oversight and guidance for the management of Taharoa Domain.
- Kaipara Moana Remediation is a partnership between Kaipara Uri, Northland Regional Council and Auckland Council for the remediation of the Kaipara Harbour catchment, developed ahead of settlement legislation.

Relationship agreements

Whanaungatanga Kī Taurangi is the relationship agreement between the Northland Mayoral Forum and Te Kahu o Taonui, signed on 31 January 2019 and still in effect. Whangarei District Council, Ngāti Kahu and Ngāti Wai are not signatories to it.

Whangarei District Council and Te Huinga (Whangārei Hapū Forum) hold the Strategic Partnership Relationship Agreement, signed in 2014 and reaffirmed in 2017, which underpins Te Kārearea.

Iwi and hapū environmental management plans

Many iwi and hapū across Northland hold Iwi and Hapū Environmental Management Plans, which are planning documents that carry weight under the Resource Management Act.

Other strategies, policies and operational programmes

Beyond formal agreements and committees, each council has its own strategic documents, policies and key performance indicators relating to iwi and hapū participation. Councils also work with iwi and hapū through a range of successful place-based, operational and community arrangements, including project working groups, roading groups, hall and reserve committees, and reserve management committees. Examples of these in the Far North include Kaikohe Wastewater Treatment Plant hapū working group, Te Pātukurea Kerikeri-Waipapa Spatial Plan, North Hokianga Roading Working Group, and the Kawakawa Domain Reserve Management Committee. These arrangements would need to be maintained through any transition.

5.4.4 Preliminary principles for the activities delivered regionally and locally

The supporting councils recognise that some activities are best undertaken consistently across Northland, while others are closely linked to local communities, local priorities and local identity. Determining the appropriate level of decision-making requires more detailed analysis than has been possible within the Head Start timeframe.

The allocation of responsibilities needs to consider decision-making at the activity level, recognising that accountability, efficiency, consistency and local responsiveness may steer each point towards different governance arrangements.

The following principles are not intended to predetermine the final allocation of responsibilities. Rather, they are proposed as a starting point for detailed design and future discussion. They are intended to guide consideration of where activities and decision-making responsibilities should sit within a future governance framework and will require further refinement through engagement with communities, iwi, hapū and key stakeholders.

For the purposes of these principles a function refers to a broad area of responsibility (e.g. parks, transport, planning), and an activity refers to specific services, actions, or decisions within a function.

- Subsidiarity (Default Position) – we would suggest this is the starting position. Decision-making should sit at the lowest level able to deliver effectively. Activities should be allocated to local bodies unless there is a clear and demonstrable benefit in retaining them at a unitary authority level.
- Functions should be allocated according to where the benefits are primarily realised. Activities delivering predominantly local benefits should sit with local bodies, while those with region-wide benefits should sit with the governing body.
- Functions requiring a uniform approach across the region should be managed regionally. Where variation between local areas is acceptable or desirable, decision-making should sit with local bodies.
- Functions that are part of an integrated network or system should be managed at the level that best enables coordination and optimisation of that system. Standalone or place-based services are more appropriately delivered locally.
- Functions should be allocated to the level that can deliver them most effectively and efficiently, taking into account economies of scale, specialist expertise, and administrative overhead.
- Functions that require tailoring to local needs, preferences, and identity should be delivered by local bodies, particularly where outcomes depend on strong community engagement.
- Decision-making responsibility should align with funding responsibility and accountability. The level making decisions should be clearly accountable to the community that funds those decisions.
- Functions with significant strategic implications, region-wide impacts, or high regulatory or legal risk should be retained at the regional level. Operational or lower-risk decisions should be delegated where appropriate.

Indicatively, local delivery of functions such as community facilities, parks and reserves, libraries, town centres, local events, community grants and community development may be consistent with these principles. Regional functions shown in Attachment 1 would be more likely to stay at the regional level. These examples are for illustrative purposes only at this stage and are subject to consideration through detailed design and engagement during the Transition Period.

5.5 Deliverability

This criterion is addressed in three parts:

- **Phase 1:** Development of the Detailed Proposal
  - Timeframe: Late September 2026 – March 2027
- **Phase 2:** Establishment Period
  - Timeframe: May 2027 - Oct 2028 (local government elections)
- **Phase 3:** Transition Period
  - Timeframe: Oct 2028 – Transition to single unitary authority (in 1-3 election cycles).

5.5.1 Phase 1: Development of the Detailed Proposal

Timeframe: Late September 2026 – March 2027

The purpose of this phase is to develop the Outline Proposal into a Detailed Proposal for consideration by Cabinet in March 2027.

The focus of this phase is detailed design of:

- the transition pathway towards the Destination Model
- the governance, funding and delivery arrangements for the Transition Model, with two unitary authorities and a Shared Regional Entity.

Table 16
Phase 1: Development of Detailed Proposal - actions and decisions

Development of the two unitary Transition Model	Development of the single unitary Destination Model
Activities that need to be completed during Phase 1	
• Engagement with iwi/hapū and PSGEs on: – affected settlement agreements, relationship agreements in the two unitary model (in context of future transition to one unitary authority) – input into design of interim two unitary operating model. • Engagement with communities on: – input into design of interim two unitary operating model, including local priorities for the Transition Period. • Detailed financial modelling to understand cost impacts and financial positions of two unitary model • Complete roadmap for Establishment Period to ensure model is established prior to October 2028 elections. • Estimate of resources and costs for the Establishment Period and to move from the Transition model to the Destination Model.	• Engagement with communities, iwi and hapū on: – early evidence gathering for input into design of single unitary operating model, including local priorities and decision making for the local governance bodies. • High level financial modelling to understand cost impacts and financial positions of single unitary model.

Development of the two unitary Transition Model	Development of the single unitary Destination Model
Decisions that need to be made during Phase 1	
• Confirm the boundary between the two unitary authorities. • Confirm if the SRE remains a separate legal entity (as opposed to a shared service). • Confirm the separation of functions to be delivered by the SRE and the unitary authority. • Governance, funding and service delivery arrangements of the SRE. • Governance arrangements for each unitary authority (independently), including decisions on Māori representation and the local governance bodies that will exist in the Transition Period. • Legislative requirements to support change to two unitary model potentially with local boards and with an SRE. • Governance and delivery through the Establishment Period (e.g. Establishment Committee or similar).	• Intended duration or maximum duration of Transition Period and alignment with election cycles and LTP periods. • Defined list of known, challenging issues that need to be resolved before transition can occur. • Mechanisms and processes for resolving these issues collaboratively and transparently. • Goals for alignment in operational areas while in Transition Period (e.g. alignment of systems and processes). • Legislative requirements to support achievement of milestones within agreed timeframe.
Development of the two unitary Transition Model	**Development of the single unitary Destination Model**
Decisions that can be made during Phase 1	
• Activities and responsibilities delegated to local governance bodies within each unitary authority (largely independently, though being mindful of future transition to single unitary authority). • Treatment of assets, revenue and debt between Whangarei District Council and Kaipara District Council. • Treatment of Northland Regional Council assets, revenue and debt (being mindful of future transition to single unitary authority).	• Any decisions from the list below that are resolvable or that can be progressed within the timeframe of the Detailed Proposal.
Decisions that do not need to be made during Phase 1	
• For each unitary authority: – Number of elected members – Number of wards, ward boundaries	• Representation arrangements. • Detailed local body boundaries, powers and funding arrangements. • Māori representation model. • Rating structures and financial strategies. • Treatment of debt. • Detailed service level alignment. • Final transfer arrangements for settlement-related obligations.

The Detailed Proposal does not need to resolve all future representation, funding or service delivery questions for the Destination Model. Its purpose is to provide sufficient certainty regarding the form and operation of the destination, the transition pathway and any decision gates or milestones on the way.

A detailed list of the priorities to be worked through in the development of the Detailed Proposal are shown in Section 8 of this Outline Proposal.

Consultation and engagement during Phase 1:

Two things run together through this phase:

- Statutory consultation on final proposal itself, so that submissions can be analysed and the proposal finalised before it is submitted to Government in March.
- Community engagement to develop the proposal. The interim model cannot be built without first working the detail through with communities. Alongside the formal consultation, the four councils would ask communities what matters to them, through various engagement methods. What is gathered would inform the Detailed Proposal and the phase that follows.

Table 17
Proposed consultation timeline for Phase 1

Period	Focus
October 2026	Lead-in and planning.
November 2026 – January 2027	Community engagement.
February 2027	Formal public consultation on the final proposal.
March 2027	Analysis and submission to Government.

Consultation would reach communities across the Far North, Whangarei and Kaipara districts, with particular focus on small, rural and remote communities, who told us through the surveys that they are concerned they will be overlooked. Alongside the general public, the programme would engage:

- community boards
- resident and ratepayer groups
- business and the primary sector
- community, health and social service organisations
- youth, and people who do not usually engage with councils
- council staff across all four organisations
- council committees and working parties
- iwi and hapū.

During this phase, consultation would take the form of:

- public meetings and drop-in sessions across the region
- focused meetings with community and representative groups
- written submissions, online and social media channels, freepost
- targeted marae-based engagement.

Elected members would lead engagement in their own communities.

Iwi and hapū have told us they expect to be involved in developing the staged transition model. Councils will explore early, meaningful and ongoing opportunities for iwi and hapū to contribute to the design of the model alongside councils.

5.5.2 Phase 2: Establishment period

Timeframe: May 2027-Oct 2028 (local government elections)

The purpose of this phase is to establish the two unitary authorities and the Shared Regional Entity so they can operate from the October 2028 local government elections, and establish the legislative settings required for the Transition Period that follows.

This phase ends around the 2028 local government elections with the establishment of two unitary authorities.

Table 18
Phase 2: Establishment Period – actions and decisions

Development of the two unitary Transition Model	Development of the single unitary Destination Model
Activities to be completed during Phase 2	
• Establishment Committee (or similar) stood up to manage Establishment Period. • Enabling legislation is developed and enacted for: – creation of each unitary authority according to its design – creation or recognition of the Shared Regional Entity – transfer of relevant regional council functions to SRE or unitary authority as appropriate – each unitary authority's compulsory participation in the SRE and funding arrangements – any modifications needed for representation reviews, Long Term Plans, annual planning or reporting. • Representation arrangements are determined for the 2028 elections, including public consultation. • Staff, assets, liabilities, contracts and statutory responsibilities are transferred to each unitary authority and SRE as appropriate. • Ongoing communications and engagement with iwi/hapū and community as appropriate.	• Enabling legislation is developed and enacted for the Transition Period with the pathway toward a single Northland unitary authority.
Decisions that need to be made during Phase 2	
• Initial representation arrangements for each unitary authority: – Number of elected members – Number of wards, ward boundaries, Māori wards – Community board or local body areas. • Activities and responsibilities delegated to local governance bodies within each unitary authority (largely independently, being mindful of future transition to single unitary). • Treatment of assets, revenue and debt between Whangarei District Council and Kaipara District Council. • Treatment of Northland Regional Council assets, revenue and debt (being mindful of future transition to single unitary).	
Decisions that can be made during Phase 2	
	• Any decisions from the list below that are resolvable or that can be progressed within the timeframe of the Establishment Period.

Development of the two unitary Transition Model	Development of the single unitary Destination Model
Decisions that do not need to be made during Phase 2	
	• Representation arrangements. • Detailed local body boundaries, powers and funding arrangements. • Māori representation model. • Rating structures and financial strategies. • Treatment of debt. • Detailed service level alignment. • Final transfer arrangements for settlement-related obligations.

5.5.3 Phase 3: Transition period

Timeframe: Oct 2028 – Transition to single unitary authority (in 1-3 electoral cycles)

During the Transition Period, the two unitary authorities and Shared Regional Entity would carry out the substantive programme of work required to establish the final Northland unitary authority. This phase addresses the challenges identified earlier in this proposal as requiring more time, engagement and analysis than the Head Start timeframe allows.

Subject to confirmation in Phase 1, the Shared Regional Entity would continue to provide continuity across the regional functions during the Transition Period, including:

- maintaining regional planning capability
- supporting regional spatial planning and natural environment planning
- maintaining catchment management and flood risk management, science and environmental monitoring, biosecurity, civil defence emergency management and regional transport planning.

The Shared Regional Entity would also participate in the programme of gradual alignment between the two unitaries as appropriate, to provide a smoother transition into the Destination Model at the end of the Transition Period.

Table 19
Priority **actions** in the Transition Period

Indicative milestones	Challenge being addressed (from Section 4.2)	Actions for both unitary authorities and the SRE, supported by central government agencies
Local voice and representation are designed, tested and confirmed	Local representation and allocation of decision-making powers	• Develop the local governance body representation model for the Destination Model. • Determine communities of interest, local body boundaries and roles. • Confirm what decisions should sit with the governing body and what should sit with local bodies. • Determine delegations, funding arrangements and accountability for local bodies. • Potentially trial aspects of the model where possible before the final unitary authority is established.

Indicative milestones	Challenge being addressed (from Section 4.2)	Actions for both unitary authorities and the SRE, supported by central government agencies
Māori representation and iwi/hapū participation are resolved	Māori representation and partnership arrangements	• Work with iwi, hapū, Māori communities and PSGEs on future Māori representation arrangements. • Resolve whether representation in the Destination Model will be through Māori wards, local bodies, statutory committees/board, partnership arrangements or a combination of mechanisms. • Determine how iwi, hapū and Māori participation is supported at regional, sub-regional and local levels. • Ensure the final model reflects Northland's different iwi, hapū and community circumstances.
Financial alignment and household impacts are worked through transparently	Affordability and distribution of financial impacts	• Compare financial strategies, rating structures and revenue and financing policies with intent to progressively align over time. • Identify financial impacts for households and businesses. • Develop principles and strategies for debt, assets, liabilities and strategic investments. • Consider whether targeted rates or transitional rating mechanisms are needed.
Asset management and investment planning are aligned and understood	Allocation of investment, services and organisational resources	• Compare current asset management strategies, infrastructure investment priorities and levels of service. • Develop shared principles for regional and local investment decisions. • Identify long-term infrastructure priorities and strategic assets. • Establish a framework for how investment decisions, service levels and funding responsibilities will operate under the Destination Model. • Test proposed approaches with communities and stakeholders where appropriate.
Service levels and local variation are deliberately resolved	Allocation of investment, services and organisational resources	• Identify differences in current service levels. • Determine where regional consistency is needed and where local variation should remain. • Link service level decisions to funding decisions. • Align asset management frameworks. • Avoid unintended cost increases from automatic standardisation to the highest current service level.

Indicative milestones	Challenge being addressed (from Section 4.2)	Actions for both unitary authorities and the SRE, supported by central government agencies
The future unitary authority is operationally ready for implementation	Implementation risk associated with transitioning to the Destination Model	• Align operating policies and business processes. • Align digital systems and data where appropriate. • Align regulatory and planning processes. • Develop common procurement, asset management and customer service frameworks. • Prepare workforce and organisational design for the final unitary authority. • Reduce the risk of a single compressed systems integration exercise at final transition.

Once resolved, the outcomes in the table above are expected to identify further legislative changes required to establish the Destination Model and give effect to the outcomes agreed through the Transition Period. Central government support will be required to develop and enact the legislation necessary for the final transition.

The Detailed Proposal in Phase 1 will establish the indicative milestones that must be achieved before the final transition can occur. These should be linked directly to the challenges identified in Section 4.2. Achievement of these milestones would demonstrate that the key matters identified in this proposal have been sufficiently resolved and that Northland is ready to proceed to the final transition.

Consultation and Engagement in Phase 3

A detailed engagement strategy for the Transition Period has not been developed and will need to reflect the decisions, priorities and issues identified through the Detailed Proposal and Establishment phases.

Engagement during the Transition Period should support meaningful participation by communities, iwi, hapū, PSGEs and other stakeholders and guided by the following principles:

- engagement should focus on matters that remain unresolved and require community, iwi, hapū and stakeholder input
- communities should have opportunities to input into the design of future governance and representation arrangements
- engagement should be proportionate to the significance of the decisions being considered
- engagement approaches should recognise the diversity of Northland communities, including rural, remote, iwi and hapū perspectives
- information should be provided in a transparent and accessible manner to support informed participation
- engagement should be coordinated across the Transition Period workstreams wherever practical to minimise consultation fatigue.

5.5.4 Controls on delivery through Transition Period

The main deliverability risk of a staged approach is drift. This Outline Proposal aims to make clear the intent that the Transition Period is time-bound, milestone-based and subject to transparent reporting.

The Detailed Proposal will confirm the specific statutory and governance mechanisms needed to ensure the final transition occurs once the agreed readiness requirements have been met.

Proposed controls to ensure that progress is made during the Transition Period can be discussed with government during Phase 1, and may include:

- a statutory commitment to establish the single Northland unitary authority by an agreed date or within an agreed maximum of three Long Term Plan cycles

- transition milestones embedded in legislation, statutory instruments or Cabinet-approved implementation arrangements
- a transition governance body responsible for monitoring progress
- public reporting against milestones
- an MCERT Relationship Advisor in each council providing early, transparent and ongoing reporting to MCERT and the Minister through the Transition Period
- escalation mechanisms if milestones are not met
- decision gates before final transition.

5.5.5 Interactions with other local government programmes

The transition pathway will need to align with wider local government reform and implementation programmes, including those shown in the Figure below.

There is a significant programme of work for local government, with each programme needing to be adequately resourced.

The timeline below brings together the key national reform milestones that are expected to affect councils between 2026 and 2031. It shows when major policy, legislative and implementation events are expected to occur, with colour coding used to distinguish reform streams.

Figure 22

Local government programme of work

JULY 2027 – JULY 2030
LTP period

JULY 2030 – JULY 2033
LTP period

2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
LATE 2026 ONWARDS City and regional deals Further regional deals announced on an ongoing basis					
LATE 2026-2028 Prepare Regional Spatial Plan (provisional on date of enactment)				BY Q2 2030 (provisional) New plans notified and become operative; old RMA plans replaced	OCTOBER 2031 Local government elections Māori ward referendum results expire
17 FEB 2026 Infrastructure Plan 30-year plan tabled	2027 Development levies expected Timing to be confirmed	2028-2030 Natural Environment Plans and District Land Use Plans developed			
MAY 2026 Northland Water incorporated	1 JAN 2027 Rates cap transitional period 2 - 4% target range transition begins		1 JUL 2029 Full rates regulator Permanent regulatory model live		
1 JUL 2026 MCERT operational New ministry stood up	2027 – 2028 Regional transport governance Arrangements determined		LATE 2029 General Elections		
20 JULY 2026 Natural environmental and planning report Committee report due	MAR 2027 Final proposals submitted Deadline to submit Head Start proposals	EARLY 2028 New planning system live Consent extensions expire; 17 combined plans			
9 AUG 2026 Head Start outline proposals due Head Start outline proposal due to Govt	MAY 2027 Cabinet approves Head Start proposals Establishment Period begins Bespoke policy and legislation drafted	MID 2028 Nominations open of local authority and unitary authority elections			
MID SEPTEMBER 2026 Cabinet decisions on Head Start Outline proposals	MID 2027 Building Amendment Bill Self-certification & BCAs enacted	MID 2028 Backstop process begins			
PRE-ELECTION Potential bill progression Emergency Management bills may pass Local Government (System Improvements) Bill Rate capping legislation introduced Infrastructure Funding and Financing Amendment bill may pass	30 JUN 2027 Water services strategies Each provider adopts first strategy	OCT 2028 Local government elections Head Start - arrangements in place Back Stop - Regional council interim governance models (CTBs) in place.			
OCTOBER 2026 – MARCH 2027 Development of Head Start Detailed Proposals Detailed design and public consultation		LATE 2028 – EARLY 2031 Regional planning framework transitional period			
1 OCTOBER 2026 Parliament suspended	1 July 2027 Northland Water commences operations	DEC 2028 Wastewater overflow rules Overflow & bypass rules take effect			
7 NOVEMBER 2026 General Election Central government general elections	2027 Emergency Management changes Anticipated implementation timing				
POST ELECTION Planning and Natural Environment Bills Two new statutes replace RMA may be passed before Parliament suspends but has not been through second reading.					
LATE DEC Building Amendment Bill Self-certification & BCAs report back from Committee					

- Planning & Environment
- Water Services
- Local Government reorganisation
- Housing & Infrastructure
- Funding and Financing
- Building System
- Local government arrangements
- Central government arrangements

5.5.6 Deliverability risks and proposed mitigations

The tables below describe the identified risks and their proposed mitigations. Further risks will be identified and added to these tables during the development of the Detailed Proposal.

Note that requests from central government to support delivery of the Outline Proposal and mitigate the risks identified below are included in Section 7 of this Outline Proposal.

Table 20

Phase 1: Risks during development of Detailed Proposal

Risk	Proposed mitigation
Insufficient agreement on the preferred transition pathway	Early engagement with participating councils, iwi, hapū, PSGEs, central government and other stakeholders to identify issues and resolve areas of disagreement before submission of the Detailed Proposal.
The Detailed Proposal does not provide sufficient certainty for Cabinet decisions	Clearly identify decisions required March 2027, decisions that can be deferred to the Establishment and/or Transition Period, and the milestones that must be achieved before the final transition.
Lack of support from all affected councils and communities	Maintain ongoing engagement with non-supporting councils, communities, iwi and hapū throughout the Detailed Proposal and Transition phases. Ensure alternative views are transparently recognised and addressed through evidence-based analysis, data, consultation and the development of agreed decision gates before progression to subsequent phases.
The Destination Model or transition pathway is not sufficiently defined	Clearly articulate the proposed end-state, transition pathway, intended timeframe and decision-making process for resolving outstanding issues.
Insufficient time or resources to complete detailed design work	Prioritise critical design decisions, utilise existing work undertaken through Head Start, and establish dedicated governance and project management arrangements for Phase 1.
Future legislative requirements are not identified early	Work closely with central government agencies during development of the Detailed Proposal to identify legislative requirements, implementation constraints and sequencing considerations.
Key transition issues are not adequately defined before entering Phase 2	Establish a clear list of unresolved issues, desired outcomes, milestones and readiness criteria that will guide the Transition Period and final transition.

Table 21

Phase 2: Establishment Period risks

Risk	Proposed mitigation
Establishment governance and accountability	Establish dedicated transition governance arrangements similar to the existing Elected Member Steering Group but with delegated decision-making authority, clear reporting and agreed milestones. Supported by transition management and dedicated staff.
Legislative and implementation timing	Legislative requirements would be identified during the detailed proposal phase, allowing sufficient time for establishment planning, organisational design and implementation before the 2028 local elections.
Workforce disruption and loss of capability	Early workforce planning, clear communication and a staged implementation approach would help retain critical organisational knowledge and maintain service delivery capability.

Risk	Proposed mitigation
Financial and implementation costs	Detailed assessment through the detailed proposal phase and progressive alignment of financial arrangements during transition.
Resource constraints across multiple reform programmes	Delivery would be coordinated alongside Local Water Done Well, planning reform and other change programmes, with activities sequenced to reduce pressure on council resources and the wider local government sector.
Service continuity during establishment	Detailed transfer planning for staff, assets, contracts and statutory responsibilities would support continuity of service delivery as the new entities are established.
Disputes arising under contracts	Early notification to contractors and an overlap in contract management (where this is changing) enables significant milestones on contracts to be planned accordingly.
Legislative readiness for the final transition	Legislative requirements identified early and developed alongside the establishment roadmap, with central government support.

Table 22

Phase 3: Transition Period risks

Risk	Proposed mitigation
Key transition issues are not resolved	The Detailed Proposal phase will establish agreed milestones linked to the transition outcomes, providing a framework and controls for assessing progress and readiness for the final transition.
Community, iwi and stakeholder support reduces over time	Ongoing engagement throughout the Transition Period would help ensure affected communities, iwi, hapū and PSGEs are involved in developing the final unitary authority model.
Changes in political leadership or priorities	The transition pathway, intended outcomes and governance arrangements would be established early, providing continuity while allowing future elected members to contribute to detailed design decisions.
Delay to the final transition	Regular reporting against agreed milestones and transition outcomes would provide visibility of progress and support timely resolution of emerging issues.
Legislative requirements for the final transition are not progressed	Legislative requirements would be identified and refined throughout the transition period, enabling the legislative framework for the final unitary authority to be developed once key transition matters have been resolved.
Loss of organisational capability due to prolonged and/or poorly managed change process (Note this risk applies to all phases).	Clear timebound milestones for the transition and effective change leadership across councils

6. Treaty settlement arrangements

Treaty settlement arrangements are enduring commitments. Northland's councils hold obligations under settlement legislation to nine post-settlement governance entities, and those obligations must be upheld with the same or equivalent effect through any reorganisation. The Crown is responsible for upholding Treaty settlements, and the councils' role is to work with the Crown and with affected entities to determine how existing arrangements carry into new unitary authorities.

At this stage the four councils are not in a position to say how each arrangement would transfer. A detailed analysis of the impact of a combined Whangarei District Council and Kaipara District Council unitary authority and a Far North District Council unitary authority on these arrangements during the Transition Period will be completed during development of the Detailed Proposal. This section sets out the arrangements affected, the matters that will need to be worked through, and the plan for working through them with post-settlement governance entities and the Crown.

6.1 Arrangements affected

6.1.1 Statutory acknowledgements

Nine iwi hold 41 statutory acknowledgements across Northland, recognising their particular cultural, spiritual, historical and traditional association with identified areas.

Table 23
Statutory acknowledgements

Iwi	Statutory acknowledgements	Settlement legislation
Te Uri o Hau	6	Te Uri o Hau Claims Settlement Act 2002
Te Roroa	2	Te Roroa Claims Settlement Act 2008
Ngāti Manuhiri	1	Ngāti Manuhiri Claims Settlement Act 2012
Ngāi Takoto	9	Ngāi Takoto Claims Settlement Act 2015
Ngāti Kuri	4	Ngāti Kuri Claims Settlement Act 2015
Te Aupōuri	6	Te Aupouri Claims Settlement Act 2015
Te Rarawa	8	Te Rarawa Claims Settlement Act 2015
Ngāti Pūkenga	1	Ngāti Pūkenga Claims Settlement Act 2017
Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa	4	Ngatikahu ki Whangaroa Claims Settlement Act 2017

Statutory acknowledgements place specific duties on councils. Councils must have regard to the acknowledgement when determining whether an iwi may be adversely affected by a resource consent application, must provide summaries of relevant consent applications to the iwi concerned, and must attach the information to statutory plans. Further work is required to assess the statutory obligations, responsibilities and timeframes involved during the development of the Detailed Proposal.

6.1.2 Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē Board

A co-governance partnership and permanent joint committee established through the Te Hiku collective redress for Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri, Ngāi Takoto and Te Rarawa. Its members are the four iwi together with Far North District Council and Northland Regional Council. The Board is a statutory governance entity established through Te Hiku claims settlement legislation arrangements, giving effect to co-governance, management and protection of Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē. The Board prepares and approves the beach management plan, appoints commissioners to hear consent applications within the management area, and monitors the state of the area.

6.2 Matters to work through

6.2.1 Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē

The Board's two council members are Far North District Council and Northland Regional Council, both of which would be disestablished under this proposal. It is important that where statutory responsibilities currently rest with Far North District Council and Northland Regional Council, any successor local authority or authorities must continue those obligations to ensure uninterrupted operation of the Board.

Consistent with Cabinet's expectations regarding settlement arrangements, the Board's membership, its beach management plan, and its power to appoint hearing commissioners must be upheld with the same or equivalent effect into successor entities and through both the Transition Model and Destination Model. Whether that can be achieved through the Head Start legislation, or whether it requires amendment to the Te Hiku settlement legislation, is a matter to work through with the Crown and the four Te Hiku iwi.

6.2.2 Consent notification duties

The duties attaching to statutory acknowledgements sit with whichever council holds the consenting function. In the Destination Model, these would consolidate within one organisation. During the Transition Period, they would either divide between two unitary authorities or sit with a new shared Regional Entity whose legal status is still to be determined. Ensuring that new institutional arrangements do not fragment or undermine existing relationships and constructive ways of working would be a substantive matter for the detailed design phase.

6.2.3 Plan for working with post-settlement governance entities

The supporting councils propose to work in partnership with affected post-settlement governance entities and the Crown through the development of the Detailed Proposal between October 2026 and March 2027 to determine how existing Treaty settlement arrangements are given equivalent effect in both the Transition Model and the Destination Model to ensure continuity throughout the Head Start process. That work would involve:

- direct engagement with each affected entity, undertaken alongside the Crown's own process so that entities are not approached twice by two processes asking different questions
- working with the Crown and the four Te Hiku iwi on how Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē carries into successor entities.

Engagement with post-settlement governance entities will continue following submission of this outline proposal, and councils would welcome the Government's guidance on aligning that engagement with the Crown's process.

7. Requests to Central Government

The requests below relate to establishing and supporting the Transition Model and the Detailed Proposal process. Any additional financial, legislative, governance or implementation support required for the Destination Model will be identified through the Detailed Proposal and Transition Period.

7.1 Legislative and regulatory support

The supporting councils seek legislative and regulatory settings that include:

- support for the legislation required to establish and facilitate the operation of the two unitary authorities and Shared Regional Entity under the Transition Model
- legislation supporting the milestones and timeframes developed and agreed in the Detailed Proposal, to ensure a successful transition to a single unitary authority within the proposed timeframe
- appropriate management of 2027 Long Term Plan requirements and electoral requirements (e.g. Representation Reviews) to ensure a logical and efficient approach to the Establishment Period
- exemptions from future rates-capping legislation where required if additional cost is driven by maintaining the agreed transition programme.

The supporting councils also seek consideration of opportunities to strengthen local decision-making and representation, including:

- empowering meaningful local decision-making through local governance bodies arrangements, potentially based on Auckland's local board model but suited to Northland's communities
- investigation of the ability of local bodies to apply targeted rates and the interaction of those powers with any rates-capping framework
- enabling Māori representation arrangements to be considered at a local body level where appropriate.

7.2 Implementation and transition support

The supporting councils seek support for the development of the Detailed Proposal and Establishment Period, including:

- financial assistance towards development of the Detailed Proposal and the Establishment Period. The supporting councils note that establishment and transition costs for Northland Waters will be approximately $15-18 million and subsequently seek a co-funded partnership approach for the development of the Detailed Proposal and Establishment period, recognising the significant technical, legal, financial, governance, Treaty settlement, engagement and implementation work required
- support for the Establishment Period and operation of a transition authority and/or establishment committee
- access to programme management and specialist transition expertise
- an MCERT Relationship Advisor in each council providing early, transparent and ongoing reporting to MCERT and the Minister through the Transition Period
- early clarity from NZTA on the future application of Funding Assistance Rates (FARs) for councils established through reform.

7.3 Supporting Northland's long-term economic development

The supporting councils seek a commitment to refresh and progress the Northland Regional Deal during the Establishment Period and Transition Period, ensuring that future priorities align with the needs, opportunities, and future capabilities of the region.

This may include commitments relating to:

- infrastructure investment in growth areas
- housing enablement projects
- state highway improvements and resilience corridors.
- vocational education and workforce development
- Māori enterprise development.

8. Priorities for the Detailed Proposal

The purpose of the Detailed Proposal is to translate the strategic direction set out in this Outline Proposal into a detailed implementation programme. It will confirm the governance, implementation and legislative arrangements required to establish the Transition Model, while also setting out the pathway, milestones and accountability framework for progressing to the Destination Model.

8.1 Priorities for establishing the Transition Model

By completion of the Detailed Proposal, the following should be developed.

Table 24
Priorities for the Detailed Proposal relating to the Transition Model

Output	By the end of the Detailed Proposal
Design of the Whangārei–Kaipara unitary authority	• Preferred boundaries, governing body structure, local body representation (if required), Māori representation, funding and service delivery arrangements identified, together with the legislative and implementation requirements needed to establish the authority and local governance bodies. • Allocation of functional responsibilities between the Shared Regional Entity and the Whangārei–Kaipara unitary authority confirmed, including key interfaces, decision-making responsibilities and accountability arrangements. • Proposed treatment of assets, liabilities, debt, reserves, contracts, strategic assets and revenue streams identified for implementation during the Establishment Period. • Organisational design principles, workforce transition arrangements, key appointments, staffing implications and continuity of service arrangements identified. • Existing community, iwi, and hapu arrangements identified with pertinent information recorded. • Community, iwi, hapū and stakeholder engagement required to inform the above arrangements.

Design of the Far North unitary authority	• Preferred boundaries, governing body structure, local body representation (if required), Māori representation, funding and service delivery arrangements identified, together with the legislative and implementation requirements needed to establish the authority and local governance bodies. • Allocation of functional responsibilities between the Shared Regional Entity and the Far North unitary authority confirmed, including key interfaces, decision-making responsibilities and accountability arrangements. • Proposed treatment of assets, liabilities, debt, reserves, contracts, strategic assets and revenue streams identified for implementation during the Establishment Period. • Organisational design principles, workforce transition arrangements, key appointments, staffing implications and continuity of service arrangements identified. • Existing community, iwi, and hapu arrangements identified with pertinent information recorded. • Community, iwi, hapū and stakeholder engagement required to inform the above arrangements.
Design of the Shared Regional Entity	• Governance arrangements, performance and reporting mechanisms, staffing approach and legislative requirements identified. • Allocation of functional responsibilities between the Shared Regional Entity and both unitaries confirmed, including key interfaces, decision-making responsibilities and accountability arrangements. • Funding arrangements including implementation costs, budget and annual funding process between unitaries, and any transitional financial issues identified. • Proposed treatment of assets, liabilities, debt, reserves, contracts, strategic assets and revenue streams identified for implementation during the Establishment Period. • Organisational design principles, workforce transition arrangements, key appointments, staffing implications and continuity of service arrangements identified. • Existing community, iwi, and hapu arrangements identified with pertinent information recorded. • Community, iwi, hapū and stakeholder engagement required to inform the above arrangements.

Treaty settlement and PSGE transition framework	• Existing Treaty settlement obligations, statutory acknowledgements, relationship agreements and other formal arrangements affected by the Transition Model confirmed. • Engagement with affected PSGEs, iwi authorities and relevant Crown agencies completed to inform proposed transition arrangements. • Transition arrangements for Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē to be identified with the Crown and four Te Hiku iwi, including continuity of statutory purpose, membership, functions, Beach Management Plan, commissioner appointment powers and settlement obligations. • A proposed approach for maintaining those arrangements, or giving them equivalent effect, developed for implementation during the Establishment Period. • Legislative requirements and matters requiring Crown involvement identified.
Planning system implementation arrangements	• Arrangements for delivery of planning functions during the Transition Period identified, including responsibilities of the two unitary authorities and the Shared Regional Entity, alignment with planning reform, and management of regional planning responsibilities.
Legislative implementation package	• Legislative and regulatory changes required to create the two unitary authorities and Shared Regional Entity identified in detail. • Transition legislation and transfer of powers, functions, assets, liabilities and obligations as required. • Exemptions or relief from LTPs and representations reviews if required.
Establishment Period governance arrangements	• Preferred governance and management arrangements for delivery of the Establishment Period identified, including the role, responsibilities and delegated authority of any Establishment Committee, Transition Authority or equivalent body. • Relationship between participating councils, the Establishment Committee (or equivalent body), and central government agencies confirmed.
Establishment Period roadmap	• Detailed work programme completed for the period from Cabinet approval to October 2028, including milestones, dependencies, decision points, resource requirements, risks, communications and engagement activities. • Critical path activities and readiness milestones identified. • Gateway decisions and approvals required during the Establishment Period identified.
Establishment Period monitoring and reporting framework	Reporting arrangements both internally and externally, risk management processes identified.

8.2 Priorities for establishing the Transition Period

By completion of the Detailed Proposal, the following should be developed.

Table 25
Priorities for the Detailed Proposal relating to the Transition Period

Output	By the end of the Detailed Proposal
Transition milestones	• Proposed maximum duration of the Transition Period identified. • Key transition milestones, decision points and dependencies identified. • Final criteria established for progression to the Destination Model. • Gateway reviews, monitoring processes and reporting arrangements established to assess progress against those milestones. • Legislation required to support progress through the Transition period identified in detail.
Local governance and representation framework	• Major governance and representation issues requiring resolution identified. • Investigate whether bespoke legislative provisions are required to support locally tailored representation arrangements, local governance bodies, and delegated decision-making powers that reflect Northland's communities of interest. • Process, responsibilities and timing for resolving those issues agreed. • Consultation requirements, statutory processes and key decision points identified. • Information required to support future decisions identified.
Māori representation and partnership framework	• Key matters requiring engagement with iwi, hapū and PSGEs identified. • Process and timing for resolving representation, participation and partnership matters agreed. • Relationship with Treaty settlement arrangements identified. • Key decision points and dependencies identified.
Financial integration framework	• Major financial integration issues identified, including debt, reserves, assets, revenue and rating matters. • Process, timing and information requirements for resolving those issues agreed. • Financial information and modelling required to support future decisions identified.
Service delivery and investment framework	• Key questions regarding future service delivery and investment priorities identified. • Process and timing for resolving those issues agreed. • Information and analysis required to support future decisions identified.
Organisational alignment framework	• Areas of potential alignment during the Transition Period identified. • Readiness indicators for the final transition identified.

Output	By the end of the Detailed Proposal
Transition governance and reporting framework	• Governance arrangements for overseeing progress towards the Destination Model identified. • Roles and responsibilities of participating councils, the Shared Regional Entity, and central government agencies identified. • Reporting, monitoring and issue-resolution processes established.

9. Decision sought

The supporting councils seek Government approval for this Outline Proposal and agreement for Northland to progress to the Detailed Proposal stage of the Head Start process.

The Detailed Proposal phase would further develop and confirm the governance, funding and implementation arrangements required for the Transition Model, and establish the pathway, milestones and timeframe for transition to a single Northland unitary authority.

Attachment 1

Northland Regional Council existing statutory functions

Activity	Legislative Basis
Biosecurity	Biosecurity Act 1993; LGA
Biodiversity	RMA; NPS Indigenous Biodiversity; LGA
Catchment Management	RMA; Soil Conservation & Rivers Control Act; LGA
Science / SOE Monitoring	RMA s35; NPS-FM; LGA
Climate Action	CDEM Act; RMA; LGA
Natural Hazards	CDEM Act; RMA; LGA
Environmental Education	LGA
Public Transport	Land Transport Management Act
Maritime including Oil Pollution Response	Maritime Transport Act; HSNO
Flood Risk Management	Soil Conservation & Rivers Control Act; RMA; LGA
Compliance Monitoring	RMA
Emergency Management	CDEM Act