



Our Places

Eastern Bay Spatial Plan



Engagement summary report

A summary of the feedback received in the first stage of community engagement

2024





Contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1. Report purpose	3
1.2. Content	3
1.3. Next steps	3
2. Engagement overview	4
2.1. Engagement metrics in summary	5
3. Levels of support	7
4. Themes of feedback	9
4.1. Infrastructure theme	10
4.2. Development theme	11
4.3. Community and lifestyle theme	12
4.4. Environmental theme	12
4.5. Economic opportunities theme	13
5. Feedback about scenarios	14
6. Substantive topics	16



1. Introduction

Once completed, “Our Places – Eastern Bay Spatial Plan” will set out where local communities want to head and provide a roadmap, or spatial plan, for how to get there. It’s about looking after our taonga, both people and places, now and into the future.

The first stage of consultation for the project has concluded, from October 14, 2024 to November 17, 2024 we asked communities across the Eastern Bay to tell us about: How can the region grow and develop, while making sure it remains a great place to live, work, play and visit?

There were two main consultation questions we asked:

1. What are your thoughts about where to plan for 5,500 new houses and land for businesses by 2055?

2. What is most important that you want us to think about and plan for to support your community and other communities across the Eastern Bay?

The project team are very grateful to the people and organisations that volunteered their time and ideas to contribute to this important project.

1.1. Report purpose

This report summarises the feedback received in the first stage of engagement. This report was prepared by the Eastern Bay of Plenty Spatial Plan Technical Working Group. It provides an information update in advance of the Project Governance Group (PGG) receiving presentations on 2 December 2024 from members of the community on their submissions to the project. It will also inform updates to the various Councils participating in the project with respect to the type and scale of feedback received.

1.2. Content

The report content includes the following sections:

Engagement overview describes the methods and metrics employed in the consultation period. The result has been a broad reaching engagement with substantial amounts of information from participants to inform the drafting of the spatial plan. The project has recorded a total of 550 individual points of feedback.

Levels of support is a barometer for the tone of comments received. Approximately 30% of the comments are supportive, 35% of the comments provide suggestions for improvements, 25% of the comments express concern and 10% of the comments are opposed to the proposed changes or certain aspects of the proposals.

Themes of feedback describes the main themes emerging from the consultation feedback. Top-level themes address infrastructure, development, community and lifestyle, environment, and economic opportunities.

Feedback about scenarios outlines what was supported or not about the three possible future scenarios that were included in the consultation materials, being: Scenario 1: Resilient greenfield areas, Scenario 2: Un-serviced rural residential focus; Scenario 3: Growth outside the sub-region.

Substantive topics: are matters highlighted by submitters that the project will need to consider in depth as the spatial plan is developed, and which are likely to require a focus at the 18 December 2024 PGG meeting. Topics encompass the settlement pattern (where and what types of development), resiliency of critical infrastructure and climate resilience.

1.3. Next steps

This report is a high-level overview of consultation feedback to provide context for the Project Governance Group presentations on 2 December 2024. It will also support reporting to Council and Iwi project partners.

On 18 December 2024, a further Project Governance Group meeting will be held. At that meeting, a recommendations report will be presented by the project team. The report will seek direction from the Project Governance Group about how the project will respond to consultation feedback and proceed to develop the spatial plan.

A further consultation period is intended to take place between mid to late 2025, this will include the draft spatial plan and implementation actions. The final plan is intended to be adopted ahead of the 2025 Local Government elections.

2. Engagement overview

The project has recorded more than 550 individual points of feedback to date across all formats—digital, physical, and in-person.

A multi-channel communication approach to consultation resulted in a balanced large-scale reach by employing both digital and physical distribution. Face-to-face events were available for people that were interested in this.

The result was a broad reaching engagement with substantial amounts of information from participants to inform the drafting of the spatial plan.

Workshops and drop-in sessions complemented broader digital, radio and print media efforts, ensuring a well-rounded approach to feedback collection and meant that people were aware that they had a chance to provide their feedback.

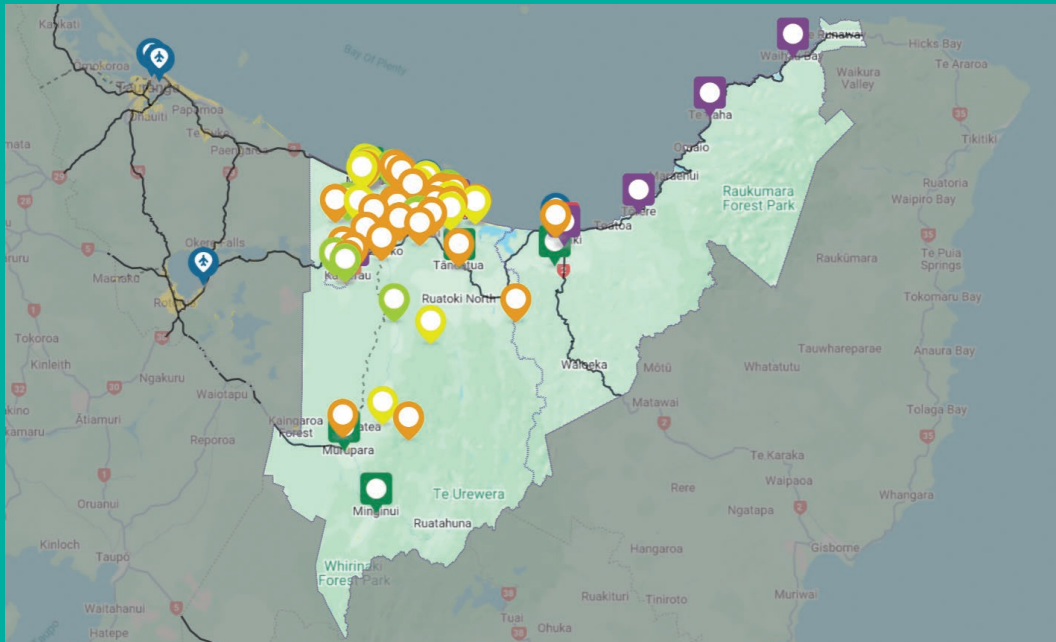


Figure 1 Social pinpoint comments on question 1

2.1. Engagement metrics in summary

At the time of writing this report:

60 written submissions and 125 pinpoint comments were received:

- 32 written submissions received in hard copy or by email and 28 survey forms submitted online.
- The social pinpoint online engagement platform saw 125 comments on the maps.

More than 300 people attended in-person events as follows:

- Six facilitated workshops were held for stakeholders and students, with 145 people attending.
- Business After 5 event via the Chamber of Commerce in the Whakatāne township, with 80 people attending.
- Eight public drop-in sessions with 100 people attending.

71,000 social media post impressions, 650,000 digital advertisement impressions were received:

- 43 posts on social media with 71,000 impressions.
- NZ Herald online – digital advertorial with 650,000 impressions and 1,050 link clicks to 'have your say'.

Other methods ranged from radio ads to surveys located in different Council community facilities:

- Online information: project website and storymaps platform.
- DL rates insert at Whakatāne District Council and Kawerau District Council.
- Radio – 1XX, Bayrock, Tumeke, SunFM, iHeart radio.
- Beacon newspaper advertisement.
- Media release.
- Physical surveys - located at Whakatane District Council customer service centres in Whakatane and Murupara, Kawerau District Council customer service centres, Ōpōtiki District Council customer service centres, Libraries - Whakatāne, Edgecumbe, Ōhope, Whakatāne Aquatic Centre.



Figure 2 Student workshop



Figure 3 Drop in session



Figure 4 Facilitated stakeholder workshop

3. Levels of support

This section sets out the estimate of supportive tone comments received, providing an indicator of how well the consultation materials were received.

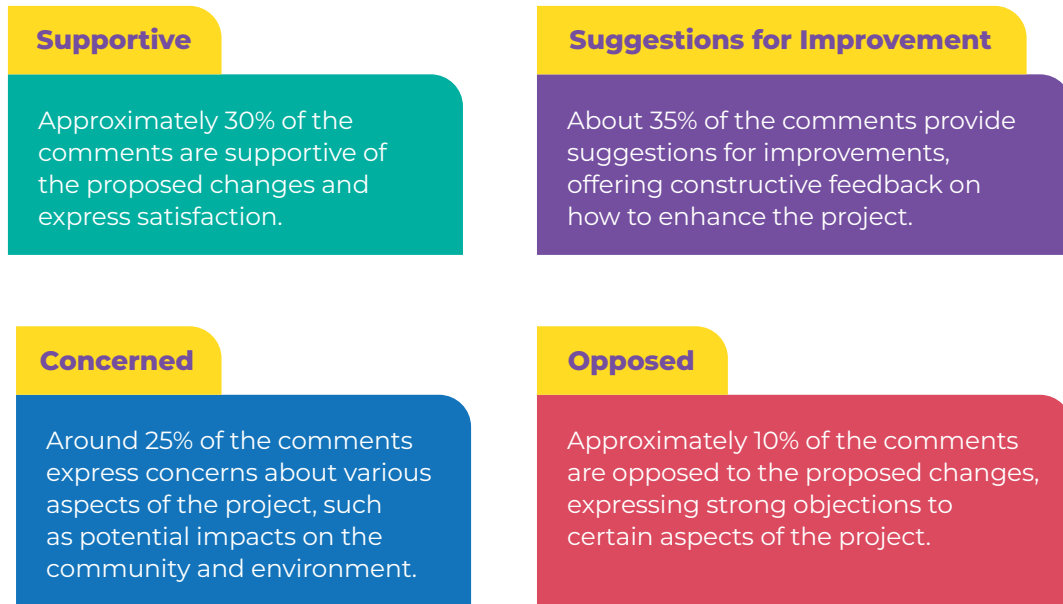


Figure 4 Levels of support

The primary reasons for **support** in the consultation feedback include:

- 1. Alignment with Environmental and Economic Goals:** Respondents appreciated that Scenario 1 aligns with the goals of the spatial plan, such as promoting a healthy and healing environment, supporting a sustainable and diversified economy, and providing jobs and purpose for the community.
- 2. Protection of Valuable Land:** Many respondents supported Scenario 1 because it emphasises the protection of valuable farming and horticultural land. They believe that regulating and protecting this land is crucial for maintaining the area’s agricultural productivity and preventing inappropriate development.
- 3. Maintaining Community Character:** Some respondents supported Scenario 1 because it helps maintain the small-town feel and community character of different areas. They believe that this scenario balances a need for development opportunities with the preservation of the sub-region’s unique qualities.
- 4. Sustainable Growth:** Scenario 1 is seen as a practical solution that can support sustainable growth. Respondents appreciated that it considers the long-term impact of development on the environment and community, ensuring that growth is managed responsibly.

The main reasons for **opposition** in the consultation feedback include:

- 1. Disrupting small-town character:** Many respondents expressed a desire to keep the community as it is, valuing the small-town feel and the current way of life. They were opposed to changes that could disrupt this character. This was particularly acute in Matatā.
- 2. Concerns About Infrastructure:** There were significant concerns about the adequacy of existing infrastructure to support new developments. Respondents highlighted issues with road congestion, particularly congestion at the Whakatāne bridge, and the potential strain on water and wastewater systems.
- 3. Cost to ratepayer:** Some respondents were worried about the economic impact of the proposed changes, particularly the potential increase in rates and the financial burden on current residents. They felt that Councils should focus on working within their budget and improving existing amenities rather than expanding into new development areas.
- 4. Environmental Concerns:** There were also concerns about the environmental impact of new developments, particularly in areas prone to flooding. Respondents emphasised the importance of listening to historical knowledge and avoiding mistakes that could lead to environmental degradation and natural hazard risks.
- 5. Lack of Support for Existing Residents:** Some feedback indicated that the proposed changes did not adequately consider the needs and preferences of current residents. Respondents felt that the Councils should prioritise supporting existing communities and improving their quality of life before focusing on new developments.

4. Themes of feedback

Across the 550 points of feedback, including submissions, there were some recurring themes that illustrated topics of importance from consultation.

Overall, feedback was focused on what to consider in the spatial plan and how to go about implementing the plan, such as through District Plans or Long Term Plans. Both types of feedback will be carried forward to the relevant processes.

The themes are as follows:



Figure 6 Themes and sub-themes

4.1. Infrastructure theme

Overall, the feedback reflects a strong desire for well-maintained and efficient infrastructure that can support the community's needs and future development.

The feedback highlighted significant concerns and suggestions regarding the infrastructure in the area. Respondents emphasised the need for substantial improvements in road infrastructure to accommodate increasing traffic and ensure safety. There were calls for the construction of new bridges, the addition of roundabouts, and enhancements to existing roads. The feedback voiced that the current road conditions are inadequate to handle growing traffic, and there is a pressing need for upgrades to support future growth.

Sub-theme 1: Transport infrastructure that is safe, efficient, and sustainable

The feedback highlighted the need for significant improvements in road infrastructure and traffic management to enhance road safety and efficiency. Respondents emphasised the importance of building new bridges, such as a second Whakatāne River bridge, to accommodate increasing traffic and provide alternative routes for commuters and travellers. There were also calls for the addition of roundabouts at critical intersections, like Rewatu Road, to facilitate smoother traffic flow and reduce congestion. Additionally, respondents suggested implementing speed control measures, such as speed bumps, to address issues of speeding in residential areas and near schools. The need for safe cycle paths was also highlighted to encourage cycling as a mode of transport and reduce traffic congestion.

Sub-theme 2: Water and wastewater services that are modern, efficient, and which protect the public health and environment

Respondents emphasised the need for improvements in the water supply system to ensure a reliable and sustainable source of water for the growing population, particularly in Whakatāne and Matatā. There were also concerns about the adequacy of the existing wastewater treatment facilities in these areas, with calls for upgrades to handle increased demand and prevent environmental contamination. In Matatā, the feedback indicated that the wastewater system has been a long-standing issue, with delays in implementing necessary improvements. In Whakatāne, respondents stressed the importance of planning for future water demand and ensuring that infrastructure can support new housing developments.

Sub-theme 3: Infrastructure resiliency to protect the community and ensure safety during natural disasters

The feedback highlighted significant concerns regarding the resiliency of infrastructure in the face of natural hazards. Respondents emphasised the importance of planning and upgrading infrastructure to withstand natural disasters such as floods, tsunamis, and earthquakes. Specific locations like Awakeri and Matatā were mentioned as areas prone to flooding, with calls for better flood management systems and the need to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of having adequate facilities to support the community during emergencies and improve the overall quality of life. There were concerns about the adequacy of existing infrastructure to support emergency evacuations, with suggestions for improvements in public amenities such as toilets and water fountains in areas resilient to natural hazards.

4.2. Development theme

Overall, the feedback reflects a strong desire for balanced and thoughtful development that enhances the area's liveability and economic prospects

The feedback addresses the need for thoughtful and sustainable development in the area. Respondents emphasised the importance of planning new housing developments carefully to avoid overburdening existing infrastructure. There were calls for more housing developments to meet the growing population's needs, with a focus on sustainable and well-planned communities. This was balanced by concerns about retaining the existing character of local communities. Additionally, commercial expansion was seen as vital for economic growth and for providing local job opportunities.

Sub-theme 1: A desire for housing development to meet demand, that is affordable, caters for a diverse (and ageing) population, and provides choices like rural residential development

There is a strong demand for new housing developments to accommodate the growing population. Respondents emphasised the importance of planning these developments carefully to avoid overburdening existing infrastructure. They also highlighted the need for affordable housing options and the importance of integrating new housing projects within existing communities to maintain the character of the area.

A need for more retirement facilities to cater to the aging population in the area was identified. Respondents noted that there are currently only a few lifestyle options or care facilities available locally, which can force older residents to relocate to other centres (i.e., outside of the Eastern Bay) to meet their needs.

Some feedback highlighted a desire for more rural residential development to accommodate the growing population and provide diverse living options, it is thought that this could be done with sustainable design. Respondents emphasised the importance of planning these developments carefully to avoid overburdening existing infrastructure, avoid and manage reverse sensitivity to industries and agricultural/horticultural operations, and to maintain the rural character of the area.

Sub-theme 2: Commercial expansion to create job opportunities and support local businesses

Commercial expansion is seen as crucial for the subregion's economic development. Respondents called for more industrial and commercial projects and land supply to create job opportunities and support local businesses. They also stressed the importance of balancing commercial growth with environmental sustainability and ensuring that new developments do not negatively impact quality of life in the community.

Sub-theme 3: Sustainable development to mitigate the impact of development

The feedback emphasised the importance of adopting sustainable development practices. This includes using eco-friendly building materials, implementing energy-efficient designs, and promoting renewable energy sources. Respondents also called for better waste management practices and the reduction of carbon emissions to mitigate the impact of urban development on the environment.

4.3. Community and lifestyle theme

Overall, the feedback highlights the community's commitment to preserving its way of life while supporting thoughtful and sustainable development

The feedback emphasises the importance of maintaining the community's character and lifestyle, including safety, peace, and the natural environment. Respondents value the area's small-town feel and the sense of community it fosters. They expressed concerns about potential changes that could disrupt the character and stressed the need for careful planning to preserve the area's unique qualities. The feedback reflects a strong desire to maintain the area's identity and ensure that any development aligns with the community's values and lifestyle. There were also calls for improvements in public amenities and infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for residents.

Sub-theme 1: Small-town community character is highly valued

Respondents value the small-town feel and sense of community across the Eastern Bay. They expressed concerns about potential changes that could disrupt this character and emphasised the importance of preserving the area's unique qualities. Maintaining the community's identity and ensuring that new developments are in harmony with the existing environment were key points of feedback.

Sub-theme 2: Recreational facilities can enhance the quality of life for residents

The feedback also highlighted the need for better recreational facilities to enhance the quality of life for residents. Respondents called for the development of parks, playgrounds, and sports facilities to provide spaces for community activities and promote a healthy lifestyle. They emphasised the importance of accessible and well-maintained recreational facilities that cater to people of all ages.

4.4. Environmental theme

Overall, the feedback underscores the importance of integrating environmental considerations into all aspects of urban planning to ensure a sustainable and resilient community

The feedback highlights significant concerns regarding the environmental impact of urban planning and development. Respondents emphasised the importance of protecting natural areas and ensuring that new developments do not lead to environmental degradation. There is a strong desire to maintain the natural beauty and ecological health of the area, with many participants stressing the need for sustainable planning practices. The feedback reflects a community deeply connected to its natural surroundings and a commitment to preserving them for future generations. Concerns were raised about the potential loss of green spaces, the impact of increased pollution, and the need for better management of natural resources including aggregate resources.

Sub-theme 1: Protection of natural areas from development

Respondents stressed the need to protect natural areas from development. They highlighted the importance of preserving green spaces, forests, and waterways to maintain biodiversity and provide recreational opportunities for residents. There were calls for stricter regulations to prevent encroachment on these areas and to ensure that any development is carried out in an environmentally responsible manner.

Sub-theme 2: Management of natural resources to ensure that the land remains productive and healthy for future generations

Effective management of natural resources was a key concern for respondents. They highlighted the need for sustainable water management practices, including the protection of water sources and the implementation of efficient irrigation systems. There were also calls for better management of soil and land resources to prevent erosion and degradation, highlighting the importance of access and availability of aggregate resources, and ensuring that the land remains productive and healthy for future generations.

4.5. Economic opportunities theme

Overall, the feedback highlights the need for balanced economic development that includes job creation, support for local businesses, and consideration of environmental and social factors

The feedback also addresses the need for economic development, including job opportunities and support for local businesses. Respondents emphasised the importance of creating a vibrant local economy that provides employment opportunities and supports the community's growth. They called for initiatives to attract new businesses and industries to the area while ensuring that economic development is balanced with environmental and social considerations.

Sub-theme 1: Creating new employment opportunities

Creating employment opportunities was a key concern for respondents. They highlighted the need for initiatives to attract new businesses and industries to the area, which would provide jobs and support the local economy, ensuring that these opportunities are accessible to the community and contribute to its overall well-being was emphasised.

Sub-theme 2: Support for local businesses to create economic development

Supporting local businesses was seen as crucial for economic development. Respondents called for measures to help small businesses thrive. They also emphasised the importance of creating a business-friendly environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation.

Sub-theme 3: Economic development needs to be balanced with environmental and social factors

Economic development was a significant theme in the feedback. Respondents stressed the need for a balanced approach that considers environmental and social factors. They called for strategic planning to ensure that new developments contribute positively to the community and do not lead to negative impacts such as increased traffic congestion or environmental degradation.

5. Feedback about scenarios

Scenario 1

Resilient greenfield areas



Provide a long-term supply of housing and business land in a series of new greenfield areas: Matatā, Awakeri, Hukutaia.

There would be a low level of residential infill and a low level of rural residential development.

(Preferred option)

Scenario 2

Un-serviced rural residential focus



Enable demand for housing to shift into rural locations, with a relaxed regulatory approach (and avoiding highly productive land and areas prone to natural hazards).

There would be a high level of rural residential development. Over time this could encourage a high level of infill and intensification of townships and villages.

Scenario 3

Growth outside the sub-region



Demand shifts out of Whakatāne and Kawerau to Western Bay of Plenty and Rotorua because there are no new greenfield areas and rural residential development is not enabled.

There would be a low level of rural residential development. Over time this could encourage a high rate of intensification and infill of townships and villages because there are few other options for housing growth in the districts.

Figure 7 Three possible future scenarios were presented for consultation

A total of 38 responses were received specifically regarding the scenarios, with 21 referring to Scenario 1, seven to Scenario 2, and three to Scenario 3. The feedback highlights diverse perspectives on the proposed scenarios, emphasising the need for balanced development, improved infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

Scenario 1: Resilient greenfield areas:

18 respondents favour Scenario 1, including Fonterra Limited, SmartGrowth Partners, and Horticulture New Zealand, for its structured growth and community development.

Submissions stress the need for community spaces, recreational facilities, and maintaining the unique character of towns. There is a call for balanced development that includes affordable housing and supports local businesses.

There is strong support for using solar, water-efficient taps, and water collection in new developments; however, there were three respondents with concerns about infrastructure improvements to handle increased traffic, challenges envisioning Matatā with 1500 more homes and businesses without adequate sewerage, and questions about why rural residential development is limited by District Plan rules in Scenario 1. Key considerations were also focused on protecting high-value agricultural land and integrating renewable energy.

Recommendations include expanding areas to cater for schools and retail, addressing the vulnerability of SH2 at Waiotaha and greater consideration for horticultural expansion. Requests for addressing natural hazard risks and climate change impacts were also made. Additionally, detailed plans on the quantum, timing, and type of growth were requested.

Scenario 2: Un-serviced rural residential focus:

Six responses favoured Scenario 2 for its potential to support resilient, self-sustaining communities.

This scenario was seen to align with Te Ao Māori values and encourage smaller-scale developments. Respondents emphasised the importance of historical settlement patterns and cultural values, noting that smaller settlements up the coast encourage self-sufficiency and resilience to issues like climate change and access loss.

Whakatāne Action Group Incorporated was specifically against Scenario 2 and the assumption that large numbers of people will be attracted to live in rural areas without basic services and highlighted various challenges and drawbacks of rural residential development. The response suggests exploring new greenfield areas for additional housing instead.

Recommendations include supporting smaller subdivision size requirements in Scenario 2, promoting papakāinga developments, and considering international trends that increase demand for natural spaces. Requests highlight the need to avoid assuming large numbers of people will move to rural areas without basic services, ensuring rural residential development does not negatively impact traditional rural activities, and the need to provide adequate infrastructure and services to support rural communities.

Scenario 3: Growth outside the subregion

Scenario 3 received three responses, two in support and one questioning the overall relevance of this scenario.

Respondents favoured this scenario to avoid overcrowding in existing towns and to support distributing growth more evenly across the region.

Recommendations focus on ensuring necessary infrastructure and services are in place to support growth outside the sub-region and addressing potential issues with community fragmentation and loss of local identity. Requests for more information on how this scenario would be implemented and its impact on existing communities, as well as considering the need for business land and economic development were also made.

Other comments about the scenarios

Two submissions suggest combining Scenarios 1 and 2 to balance structured growth with resilient, rural development. This combination is seen as appropriate by some respondents, who believe it accommodates town and coast aspirations, providing more options and flexibility.

Some respondents prefer dispersed villages over centralized communities and questioned the limitations on rural residential development in Scenario 1.

Others reject all three proposed scenarios, highlighting issues such as wastewater ponds in Hukutaia and suggesting new options that prioritize local infrastructure and community involvement in planning decisions. Some of these comments preferred that development takes place outside of the sub-region.

6. Substantive topics

This section brings forward topics highlighted by submitters that the project will need to consider in depth as the spatial plan is developed, and which will require a direct response at the 18 December 2024 meeting with the Project Governance Group.

Topics encompass the settlement pattern (where and what types of development), resiliency of critical infrastructure and climate resilience. Given this is a summary, please note this is not an exhaustive list. Responses to these, and other feedback, will be considered as the spatial plan is further developed.

Settlement pattern (where and what types of development)

Most respondents are in favour of meeting development demands within the Eastern Bay.

Matatā residents have provided feedback that the scale of change, being 1,500 dwellings, and what this would impose is likely to affect the community character that is highly valued and that this scale of change is undesirable.

Many submitters queried why the principal focus for growth was not on the existing centres and maximising infill development, promoting higher densities (upzoning) and utilising existing infrastructure.

Feedback included a minor push to intensification in Kawerau– to include duplexes and some townhouses, people also like the open spaces around Kawerau and want to retain it's character.

There were requests for making rural residential development more enabled in District Plans in suitable locations, and there were stated concerns that this would need to be well controlled to avoid and manage reverse sensitivity.

Three submissions made specific requests to have land areas considered as development options in the spatial plan.

- Māori Land Trusts (Golf Links Road Partnership, Te Paroa Lands Trust, Hunia Marupo Lands Trust, Ratahi Lands Trust, Kiwinui Lands Trust, Rotoehu Lands Trust) represent owners of land holdings between Coastlands, Whakatāne Golf course and the Whakatāne Airport (188 hectares across four land parcels – Māori Freehold Land and freehold title)
- Ōpihi structure plan land owners are seeking recognition for the provision of development at this location pursuant to the approved structure plan and land use subdivision consent.
- Baird Road and River Flats land parcels for industrial and commercial use near the western side of Ōpōtiki township.

Resiliency of critical infrastructure

Feedback was received on the existing vulnerability of the road network i.e., SH2 and SH35 bridges and roads. NZTA's submission recognised their commitment to addressing resiliency issues across their network, and that work is identified in relation to resiliency improvements for State Highway 2 in the NLTP 2024-27.

In some locations, infrastructure is struggling to cope with the existing demand leading to traffic congestion. More of the state highway and local road network will be exposed to resiliency issues over time from climate change. There are limited/restricted alternative routes available. Suggestions were received to build new bridges (even a tunnel).

Feedback was received on the need to recognise the resiliency of critical infrastructure networks (e.g. National Grid) and their role in responding to and recovering from natural hazard events. This highlights the role of the national grid in enabling growth along with the need for protection from inappropriate development.

Climate resiliency

Concerns were expressed about the impact of natural hazards and those driven by climate change on existing settlements and the long-term growth areas outlined in Scenario 1 – Matatā and Awakeri.

Our Places

Eastern Bay Spatial Plan

kiaora@ourplacesebop.org.nz

ourplacesebop.org.nz