

Regional Spatial Planning Roadshow

Briefing Note 8: What does RSP mean for Auckland's spatial planning as a large metropolitan unitary authority?

July - August 2026





8. What does RSP mean for Auckland's spatial planning as a large metropolitan unitary authority?

This Briefing Note supports a RSP Roadshow presentation to chief executives, tier-two leaders, planning managers, reform leads, programme managers, and prospective RSP secretariat or committee support staff. Issues of organisational design, establishment choices, and key points for council managers, taking account of Head Start scenarios are covered.

This note draws on papers prepared to support Workshop presentations that are synthesised in this series of eight Briefing Notes on topics relevant to organisational readiness for regional spatial planning. It includes information and advice based on official sources prepared for Taituarā by Simon Markham Consulting Ltd as an advisory Briefing Note.

Its statutory framing is Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, on regional spatial plans, national instruments, process agreements, iwi consultation, spatial plan committees, public notification, hearings, adoption, implementation, and review. It considers what the current Bill and subsequent legal commentary mean for council managers, in light of existing spatial-planning collaborations and wider regional collaboration experience.

This Note is current to 14 September 2026. It integrates the July 2026 report-back changes into the substantive text and adds subsequent Committee-stage changes reflected in Planning Bill 235-3, together with relevant interpretation from the Regional Spatial Planning Legal Commentary Paper as at 14 September 2026 that accompanies this series of Briefing Notes. The Bill has completed Committee of the whole House consideration but has not yet received third reading or Royal assent. All update material is fully integrated into the main text.

1. Executive Summary

Auckland is institutionally simpler than most regions because Auckland Council is a unitary authority: the same organisation holds territorial authority and regional council functions for the Auckland region. But Auckland is not simpler as a regional spatial planning (RSP) implementation task.

It is New Zealand's largest metropolitan system, with scale, infrastructure, transport, housing, climate, coastal, iwi/Māori, local board, central government, and council-controlled organisation interfaces that make its future regional spatial plan a major whole-of-council and whole-of-region operating challenge. Although Auckland may not be simpler, it is well positioned because it has deep spatial planning expertise, existing regional spatial planning/Future Development Strategy material and established working arrangements with central government.

The Planning Bill brings Auckland into the new national regional spatial planning regime. The source Auckland paper identifies the critical Auckland-specific transition point: when Auckland Council gives public notice that

it has adopted its first regional spatial plan under the Planning Bill regime, Part 6 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 is repealed. In practical terms, Auckland's existing Auckland Plan / statutory spatial planning framework becomes a bridge to, rather than a substitute for, the new regional spatial plan.

For managers, the key message is that Auckland will need less multi-council negotiation than Waikato, Wellington, Canterbury, or other multi-council regions, but it will need a highly disciplined internal and external operating model. The challenge is to bring together Auckland's existing spatial planning, Auckland Unitary Plan, Future Development Strategy, transport reform, infrastructure planning, climate adaptation work, Māori statutory architecture, and local board governance into an *integrated statutory RSP* process that can carry greater legal effect than today's broad Auckland Plan framework.

Planning Bill 235-3 also increases the importance of Auckland's national interface. National standards can prescribe standardised RSP provisions and methodologies, so Auckland's scale and technical capability will not translate into unrestricted local drafting discretion. The enterprise programme should distinguish nationally fixed content from the major spatial and sequencing choices that remain for Auckland.

Auckland's unitary authority status should not be read as an exemption from the Planning Bill operating model. As currently drafted, Auckland should still prepare a public process agreement or process statement, constitute or designate an RSP Committee with appropriate terms of reference, appoint a chairperson in accordance with regulations and have a committee-directed secretariat that complies with section 73A, including Ministry-chief-executive-appointed technical experts or advisers whose secretariat work is Crown-funded, provide for central-government participation in the secretariat, and document how local boards, the Independent Māori Statutory Board, mana whenua, mataawaka where relevant, CCOs, infrastructure providers, adjacent regions and CG agencies influence the statutory RSP process.

Section 71 confirms the single-local-authority route for Auckland: a committee, subcommittee or other subordinate body appointed for the Act may perform the spatial plan committee role. The body must be expressly constituted or uplifted for the statutory RSP functions, and at least one member must have knowledge, skill and experience relating to te ao Māori and Māori development.

The process agreement will look different from a multi-council regional agreement. It should function as a single-authority council-group and partner compact, recording internal roles and decision pathways as well as external CG, adjacent-region, iwi/Māori, infrastructure, sector, and community engagement arrangements.

The current Bill adds two Auckland-specific transition issues to that compact. First, Schedule 1 clause 10 provides that Part 6 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 ceases to apply when Auckland adopts its first RSP and gives the required public notice. Second, all existing and initiated Mana Whakahono ā Rohe cease after Royal assent; Auckland's Māori participation architecture therefore needs to preserve direct statutory duties and relationships while treating any new iwi participation agreement as a separate request-based mechanism.

Planning Bill 235-3 is now the consolidated pre-third-reading baseline. The report-back RSP machinery remains, with later Committee-stage changes layered onto it. The separate Climate Change Response

Amendment Bill remains a separate source stream; importantly, Planning Bill 235-3 itself now requires RSPs to identify priority areas for planning adaptation to the effects of climate change. The Bill has not yet been enacted.

2. What Auckland managers need to know now

2.1 Auckland has a head start, but not an exemption

The Planning Bill requires every region to have a regional spatial plan, and the plan boundary must align with the relevant regional boundary. Auckland's single-council regional geography gives it a governance head start: there is no need to negotiate a local-authority process agreement across multiple territorial authorities and a regional council. However, the statutory RSP framework still requires a process agreement, a spatial plan committee, a chair and secretariat, iwi consultation, engagement with central government and adjacent regions, infrastructure-provider involvement, public notification, an independent hearings panel process, adoption, review, and Implementation plans.

Schedule 2 clause 4 makes the process agreement binding even in a one-local-authority region. For Auckland it should operate as the public council-group and partner compact: working relationship and decision responsibilities, consultation/stakeholder identification, secretariat establishment/management, applicable iwi-participation/JMA processes, and the wider Auckland-specific operating clauses needed for local boards, infrastructure, CCOs and central government.

Auckland feature	What it means for RSP	Managerial implication
Unitary authority status	Auckland Council holds both territorial and regional functions for Auckland, reducing inter-council complexity.	Do not mistake single-council status for low complexity. The governance challenge shifts from inter-council negotiation to whole-of-council-group integration.
Existing Auckland Plan / spatial planning framework	Provides a strong strategic foundation and evidence base for growth, development, infrastructure, and outcomes.	Use it as transition material and policy context, but redesign the statutory RSP around Planning Bill content, process, and downstream legal effects.
Auckland Unitary Plan	Auckland already has experience with an integrated regional/district RMA plan.	Treat the AUP as the current operative implementation plan and evidence source, not the future statutory RSP.
Scale and metropolitan complexity	Growth, intensification, rural-urban interface, coastal risk, transport corridors, Hauraki Gulf, islands, and infrastructure sequencing all converge in one plan.	Auckland's RSP will need very strong evidence, GIS, infrastructure, funding, transport, legal and engagement capability.
Auckland Council group / CCO structure	Transport, water, regeneration, property, development, and community outcomes involve multiple council-group entities.	The secretariat must be able to coordinate across the council group, not simply within a policy planning team.
Existing Māori statutory architecture	The Independent Māori Statutory Board, mana whenua, mataawaka, iwi authorities and Treaty/coastal interests sit alongside Planning Bill consultation duties.	Design Māori partnering/participation arrangements early and ensure they integrate rather than duplicate Auckland-specific structures. Update the operating model for MWAR cessation while preserving Auckland-specific statutory structures, Treaty/JMA

		duties, direct RSP consultation and any later iwi participation agreement.
Process agreement in a unitary authority region	There may be only one local authority, but the Bill still requires the process matters for preparing the RSP to be agreed and publicly recorded.	Prepare a single-council process agreement/process statement that operates as a council-group and partner compact, not as a waived inter-council agreement.
RSP Committee constitution still required	Auckland can use existing committee machinery only if it is explicitly uplifted to perform Planning Bill RSP functions.	Do not rely on a general strategy committee unless the ToR covers RSP preparation, options assessment, IHP advice, Implementation plans, CG interface, local-board pathways, and adoption/reporting steps.
Central government and secretariat interface	The updated RSP Committees note, and SAR distinction indicates central government may be represented on committees but must be part of spatial plan secretariats.	Design a CG interface within the Auckland RSP secretariat and clarify how NZTA, HUD, MoT, Treasury, MBIE, DOC, DIA and other relevant agencies will provide a coherent view. MCERT is working on this, and will continue to lead the design. Clarify that s 73A itself requires Ministry-appointed Crown-funded technical expertise; a wider whole-of-government secretariat/officials arrangement is additional operating design.
National-standard exposure	Auckland may have deep local capability, but national standards can prescribe RSP methods and standardised provisions.	Build an enterprise national-instrument function that identifies what is fixed nationally and focuses Auckland decision-making on authorised spatial/parameter choices.

2.2 The main shift is from a strategic city plan to a statutory RSP with downstream effect

The Auckland Plan 2050 is a long-term vision and strategic framework. Auckland also has related growth, development, infrastructure, climate, Māori outcomes, local board, and unitary plan instruments. The Planning Bill RSP is similar in being strategic and long-term, but it is much more directly embedded in the new resource management system.

Under the Bill, the regional spatial plan has specified effects through the new land use plan, the natural environment plan, regional land transport planning, Government Policy Statements on land transport, and local authority long-term planning. That changes Auckland's spatial planning from a high-level guiding framework to a statutory front-end instrument that downstream planning and investment systems must implement or align with to the extent required by the legislation.

Dimension	Auckland Plan / current spatial planning	Planning Bill RSP implication for Auckland
Legal position	Auckland-specific spatial planning framework and broader strategic plan architecture.	A statutory regional spatial plan within the combined plan architecture.

Time horizon	Long-term Auckland-wide strategy, commonly understood through a 30-year Auckland Plan frame.	At least 30-year strategic direction for development and public investment priorities.
Content frame	Growth, development, outcomes, infrastructure, environment, prosperity, culture, and community wellbeing.	Core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D: a broad spatial layout for 30 years or longer; priority growth and change locations; significant existing and future infrastructure; significant constraints; priority adaptation locations; key drivers; specified designations, statutory acknowledgements, sites of significance to Māori, customary marine title/protected customary rights, and aquaculture settlement areas; relevant national instruments; objectives, maps, and actions. An RSP must not include rules.
Implementation effect	Influential across council strategies, budgets, infrastructure, FDS and regulatory planning, but not the same as a statutory RSP hierarchy with direct linkage to funding plans.	Land use and natural environment plans implement the RSP; RLTP consistency and LTP action requirements sharpen the implementation connection. Section 68 now makes the chain explicit: LUP/NEP implement the RSP, RLTP is consistent, GPS takes the RSP into account, and LTP records steps for Auckland-led RSP actions.
Public process	Auckland plan-making and engagement processes shaped by Auckland-specific and LGA arrangements.	Uniform Planning Bill RSP process with public notification, options assessment, IHP recommendations and adoption stages.
Transition point	Existing Auckland-specific spatial plan provisions remain part of the current framework.	Part 6 of the Auckland Council Act is repealed when Auckland publicly notifies adoption of its first RSP under the Bill. Schedule 1 cl 10 confirms the repeal trigger is the date specified in the public notice by which Auckland adopts its first RSP under Schedule 2 cl 34.
National standardisation	Auckland Plan material is locally developed and flexible in form.	National standards may prescribe RSP objectives/actions/policies/methods and standardised provisions; Auckland can only make spatial/alternative/parameter choices where the standard authorises them.

2.3 Auckland's RSP establishment is a council-group operating model issue

This council-group operating model should now expressly include the process agreement, RSP Committee ToR, secretariat specification, central-government representation model, IHP/public notification pathway, and implementation-plan responsibilities. These are not optional just because Auckland is a large unitary authority; they are the organisational arrangements through which the Auckland RSP becomes a Planning Bill instrument rather than a refresh of existing strategy.

In multi-council regions, RSP readiness concentrates heavily on how multiple councils form a committee, secretariat, and process agreement. In Auckland, those questions remain, but the real test is whether Auckland Council can align the governing body, local boards, Independent Māori Statutory Board, mana whenua, mataawaka, Auckland Transport reform structures, Watercare, council-controlled organisation interfaces, infrastructure strategies, climate adaptation work, and central government participation into one coherent statutory spatial planning programme.

This means Auckland's RSP cannot sit in a single planning-policy silo. It should be treated as an enterprise programme spanning strategy, planning, transport, infrastructure, environment, resilience, housing, Māori outcomes, local board services, legal, finance, digital/data, communications, and governance.

3. Auckland-specific implications of the Planning Bill

3.1 Process agreement implications

The Bill requires local authorities in each region to agree matters for preparing the RSP. For Auckland, the legal party is essentially Auckland Council, but the practical process agreement still needs to operate as a cross-council-group and partner compact.

Process agreement requirement	Auckland-specific issue	What managers should build in
Key geographical areas, issues, and opportunities	Auckland includes metropolitan core, growth corridors, rural areas, islands, Hauraki Gulf catchments, coastal communities, and major infrastructure corridors.	A spatial priorities map and issue register that distinguishes regional, sub-regional and local-board/place issues.
Roles and responsibilities	Roles sit inside one council but across many departments, committees, local boards, CCOs and partner entities.	A council-group RACI: Governing Body, committees, local boards, IMSB, mana whenua, Watercare, transport entities, infrastructure, and central government.
Central government	Auckland depends heavily on CG transport, housing, infrastructure, resilience, and city deal decisions.	A CG engagement protocol tied to infrastructure funding, transport, housing, climate adaptation, and major designating authorities. Treat this as an important Auckland operating clause rather than a separate mandatory clause 4 item; distinguish the statutory s 73A Ministry-expert role from wider collective-government engagement.
Adjacent regions	Auckland spatial choices affect and are affected by Northland and Waikato, especially growth, transport, freight, water, energy, coastal and rural interfaces.	Formal adjacent-region engagement with Northland, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty, including cross-boundary strategic infrastructure (e.g., Ports) and growth assumptions. Use Schedule 2 cl 5 if formal inter-regional common content is proposed; a section 74E joint RSP is a different pathway.
iwi/Māori partnering/participation	Auckland has complex mana whenua, mataawaka, IMSB, Treaty, sites of	An Auckland Māori partnering/participation architecture that integrates Planning Bill

	significance, Māori land, customary marine/coastal and Gulf relationships.	duties with existing Auckland-specific Māori governance arrangements. Do not carry MWAR forward after Royal assent. Map direct RSP duties, Treaty/JMA obligations, Auckland-specific Māori governance, and any requested iwi participation agreement separately.
Infrastructure providers and communities	Infrastructure choices involve Watercare, transport, energy, ports, airport, health, education, utilities, developers, local boards, and communities.	A structured stakeholder architecture, not a single consultation plan. Include provider forums, local board pathways, and community engagement sequencing.
Committee and secretariat arrangements	Auckland still needs to show how the RSP Committee, chair and secretariat are constituted and how they relate to Governing Body, committees, local boards, IMSB, CCOs and the council executive.	Include committee/secretariat clauses in the process agreement so the public can see how the statutory RSP machinery will work.
Current-boundary and reform assumptions	Auckland itself is not a multi-council Head Start scenario in the same way as other regions, but national Head Start decisions, adjacent-region changes and final Bill/regulatory settings may affect interfaces.	Include assumptions and review triggers for adjacent-region changes, CG representation settings, transport reform, local-board processes, and final regulations.
Central-government working model	Auckland's RSP will involve national transport, housing, infrastructure, resilience, fiscal and environmental interests.	Record how the Ministerial appointee, CG officials group, CG secretariat input, NZTA/Waka Kotahi, and any RPSC/convening role will be coordinated.
National instruments / standardised provisions	Auckland must implement NPD and national standards; standardised RSP provisions may be mandatory and unamendable.	Allocate enterprise responsibility for national-instrument interpretation, spatial/parameter choices, committee advice, and change control.

3.2 Committee and terms of reference implications

Auckland may not need a multi-council RSP Committee, but it still needs a committee or committee-equivalent that can perform the Planning Bill functions. It should not simply be a continuation of a general strategy committee unless its terms of reference are upgraded for statutory RSP functions, Ministerial appointee interface, IHP processes, public notification, Implementation plans, and links to LTP/RLTP/land-use/natural-environment planning.

The options for Auckland RSP Committee design are not standalone or entirely discrete. For example, some of the latter 'option' voting rights and protocols, etc., could apply to the top 3 models. Some are subsets about how to bring in other parties, rather than the core decision making body. They are set out to promote thinking about the framing of the RSP Committee.

Governance option	Potential fit for Auckland	Key risks / design questions
Dedicated Auckland RSP Committee	A purpose-built committee of the Governing Body or an LGA committee with specified RSP functions.	Strong statutory focus, but must connect to local boards, IMSB, infrastructure, transport, and finance committees.
Existing strategy/planning committee with expanded RSP ToR	Builds on existing committee architecture and council reporting systems.	Risk of treating RSP as BAU strategy; ToR must explicitly cover Bill functions and IHP/adoption steps.
RSP Committee plus advisory/reference structures	Useful for integrating local boards, mana whenua/IMSB, infrastructure providers, youth/community/business/rural voices and CCOs.	Advisory structures need clear influence points, so advice is not detached from decision-making.
RSP Committee linked to ARTC and infrastructure forums	Recognises transport reform and the need for land use/infrastructure sequencing. ARTC could potentially provide a committee platform for spatial planning, with adjustments and add-ons. But would need role clarity/TOR for RSP process versus transport.	Avoid two parallel 30-year strategies with two different but overlapping governance arrangements, moving at different speeds, using different growth assumptions.
Mayor/Governing Body sponsor model with technical programme board	Useful for whole-of-council accountability and rapid escalation.	Needs transparency and clear formal decision rights under the Bill.
Process agreement-linked RSP Committee model	Auckland's committee ToR should be developed in parallel with the process agreement/process statement.	Avoid a mismatch where the public process agreement says one thing, but the committee ToR, secretariat mandate and council-group reporting pathways operate differently.
Committee with CG and infrastructure protocols	Auckland's scale means CG appointee, agency workstreams, NZTA, ARTC, Watercare, ports, airport, utilities, and designating authorities may all be involved.	Specify who sits at the committee, who participates through workstreams, who advises the secretariat, who has conflicts, and how CG positions are authorised.
Committee design tested against proposed voting-rights changes	If Auckland uses an LGA-based committee, proposed restrictions on non-elected voting rights may affect appointed-member or partner-member design.	Separate voting membership from advisory, reference, IMSB, mana whenua, infrastructure, and CG participation pathways unless a clear statutory pathway permits voting.
Committee with explicit national-standard decision protocol	Any of the core Auckland committee models can add a protocol separating mandatory standardised content from spatial/parameter choices left open to Auckland.	Avoids spending governance time on nationally settled text and provides a clear legal/policy route for the choices that remain.

3.3 Secretariat implications

Auckland's secretariat should be an enterprise spatial planning programme office with governance capability. The Bill refers to a secretariat, but for Auckland this is likely to require more than administrative support. It will need to coordinate across Auckland Council group entities, manage major evidence systems, support the

committee and likely also the IHP process, maintain records, run options/scenario work, coordinate iwi/Māori and partner engagement, align with transport reform and support implementation monitoring.

Section 73A requires the Auckland RSP secretariat to be committee-directed and to include one or more Crown-funded technical experts or advisers appointed by the Ministry chief executive. Sections 73B-73D also require the committee/secretariat to support an implementation plan recording actions, priority, responsible actors, timing and planned or secured funding, followed by annual monitoring and reporting.

Secretariat role	Auckland-specific requirement
Programme management	Maintain an integrated RSP programme plan across strategy, planning, infrastructure, transport, environment, legal, finance, local boards, and engagement.
Governance servicing	Support committee papers, agendas, decision logs, local board inputs, IMSB/mana whenua interfaces, CG interface, and council-group reporting.
Evidence and GIS coordination	Integrate Auckland Plan, AUP, FDS, PC120, hazards, transport, infrastructure, climate, coastal, Māori, ecological and investment datasets. Add s 67C evidence robustness/proportionality/uncertainty controls and maintain the spatial evidence needed for environmental limits/action plans, strategic hazards, and long-lived water infrastructure.
Options and scenario management	Support scenarios around compact city, growth sequencing, infrastructure capacity, climate adaptation, rural protection, economic nodes, and transport corridors.
Partner engagement coordination	Maintain structured engagement with mana whenua, IMSB, mataawaka where relevant, CG agencies, ARTC, infrastructure providers, adjoining regions, and local boards.
Public process and IHP support	Manage notification, submissions, hearing preparation, IHP support, responses to recommendations, document control, and public-facing materials.
Implementation and monitoring	Prepare Implementation plans, assign lead agencies, align with LTP, RLTP, transport plan, infrastructure strategies, and annual reporting.
CG secretariat interface	Provide an Auckland-facing mechanism for central-government officials to participate in or alongside the secretariat, consistent with the SAR expectation that central government must be part of spatial plan secretariats. Describe the s 73A Ministry-appointed expert/adviser role separately from any broader Auckland-CG officials/agency interface.
Committee and process-agreement integration	Maintain the operating links between the process agreement, RSP Committee ToR, local-board pathways, IMSB/mana whenua interfaces, CCO workstreams, CG inputs, IHP processes and implementation-plan reporting.
Assumptions and transition control	Maintain a live register for final Bill provisions, regulations, national direction, transport reform, Auckland housing settings, CG representation settings, and adjacent-region/local-government-reform interfaces.
National instruments and standardisation	Track statutory NPD/national standards, standardised RSP provisions, Auckland's authorised spatial/parameter choices, implementation assumptions, and change-control decisions.

3.4 Consequential organisational point: Auckland is a unitary authority, but not outside the Planning Bill machinery

For Auckland, the Planning Bill shifts the organisational question from inter-council agreement to whole-of-council-group and partner alignment. The process agreement should therefore set out internal role allocation

and external engagement; the RSP Committee should be expressly constituted or designated for statutory RSP functions; and the secretariat should be an enterprise programme office with CG input, public-notification/IHP capability and implementation-plan support.

4. Spatial planning issues that are especially important for Auckland

Auckland's RSP will need to meet the core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D through the lens of a large metropolitan unitary authority. Auckland's existing strategic work is highly relevant, but the RSP must bring together topics that may currently sit in separate plans, programmes, or organisations, using the applicable Schedule 2 process and evidence mechanisms.

The RSP's statutory content in 235-3 includes priority areas for planning adaptation to climate-change effects. Auckland should align flood, coastal, instability, heat, infrastructure, growth, Māori, and community evidence so the rationale and scale of those priority areas can be transparently tested. The separate Climate Change Response Amendment Bill remains a related but distinct stream.

Issue	Why it is significant in Auckland	RSP readiness implication
Urban intensification and growth sequencing	Auckland faces continuing housing and population pressure, with recent PC120 and Auckland housing-specific legislative changes reshaping intensification settings.	RSP evidence should reconcile housing capacity, infrastructure capacity, transport access, resilience, and community outcomes. The post-Committee urban-land-market framework and Illustrative NPD (non-binding) reinforce a likely emphasis on abundant development opportunities, infrastructure-supported growth, and sequencing. Test Auckland spatial options against that direction without treating the Illustrative NPD as law.
Transport and land-use integration	The 2026 transport governance reforms create an ARTC and a 30-year transport planning mechanism, while the Planning Bill requires RLTP consistency with the RSP.	RSP and ARTC work programmes must share assumptions, sequencing, evidence, and investment priorities.
Infrastructure funding and investment	Auckland's growth depends on water, wastewater, stormwater, transport, energy, social infrastructure, and development infrastructure timing.	The RSP must show where growth is feasible, where investment is critical and where sequencing or constraints should change expectations. AP 710/NEB changes increase the significance of long-lived water storage/distribution infrastructure and environmental headroom/action-plan information in RSP sequencing.
Climate adaptation and natural hazards	Flooding, coastal inundation, instability, and storm events affect existing and future urban areas, infrastructure, and communities.	Adaptation-priority locations and risk-based spatial choices should be built into the RSP evidence and scenarios, not left to later implementation plans.
Hauraki Gulf, islands, and coastal marine area	Auckland's spatial system includes major coastal and marine interfaces,	The RSP must integrate coastal constraints, customary marine interests, Gulf

	catchments, islands, ports, ferry links, recreation, and ecological limits.	legislation, infrastructure, tourism, ecology, and community resilience. 235-3 also reflects changed marine/fishing jurisdiction and out-of-scope effects settings arising at Committee stage; coastal RSP work should distinguish strategic spatial choices from controls the planning system will no longer make.
Rural Auckland and productive land	Auckland is not only metropolitan; it includes rural settlements, productive land, coast, ranges, and infrastructure corridors.	The RSP must avoid becoming a metropolitan-core plan and should explicitly address rural, peri-urban, and edge-growth tensions.
Local boards and community geography	Local boards provide place-based governance and understand local community infrastructure, transport, and growth impacts.	The RSP process needs a formal local board input pathway and feedback loop, while keeping regional statutory decision-making coherent.
Māori outcomes and sites of significance	Auckland has multiple mana whenua interests, mataawaka communities, IMSB architecture, sites of significance, Māori land, and coastal/customary matters.	A Māori partnering/participation and evidence workstream should be a core establishment component, not a later consultation workstream. Update the participation architecture for MWAR cessation and any request-based iwi participation agreement while preserving IMSB/mana whenua/Treaty and direct RSP duties.

5. What is different for Auckland compared with other regions?

Compared with...	Auckland difference	Management consequence
Large multi-council regions	No need to negotiate equal participation among many local authorities, but Auckland still has many internal governance, local board, and council-group interfaces.	Focus effort on internal alignment, CG/ARTC/CCO interfaces and local-board pathways rather than inter-council membership formulas.
Small/unitary regions	Auckland is a unitary authority but at a very different scale, with national infrastructure and housing significance.	The committee and secretariat need metropolitan-scale programme capacity and central-government engagement.
Existing sub-regional spatial plans	Auckland already has region-wide strategic planning but also large numbers of sub-regional/place-based strategies.	RSP must consolidate and discipline the hierarchy of Auckland spatial documents.
A standard FDS	Auckland's RSP will absorb or supersede some growth-sequencing functions but cover a wider statutory content set.	FDS/HBA/PC120 work should be treated as evidence streams rather than the RSP itself.
Current Auckland Plan	The Auckland Plan has broad outcome direction; the RSP will have a sharper statutory implementation function.	Managers should plan for transition from broad strategic narrative to more spatially explicit, implementation-facing and hearing-tested content.
Other unitary authorities	Auckland's unitary status removes inter-council bargaining but not the need for a process agreement/process statement, RSP	Treat the organisational design as enterprise-scale and statutory, not as a simplified BAU council strategy process.

	Committee, chair, secretariat, and CG/adjacent-region/iwi/infrastructure interfaces.	
Updated RSP Committee and Secretariat notes	The updated series places more weight on committee ToR, current-boundary continuity, CG secretariat participation, NZTA/RPSC roles and voting-rights constraints.	Carry those design questions into Auckland's committee and process-agreement work even though Auckland has one council.

6. Key establishment tasks for Auckland managers

Workstream	No-regrets action now	Output
Statutory transition map	Map the repeal trigger for Auckland Council Act Part 6, and the relationship between the Auckland Plan, FDS, AUP, PC120 and the future RSP. Include Schedule 1 cl 10 Auckland Council Act Part 6 cessation and the first-RSP statutory timing chain.	Auckland spatial planning transition map.
Governance design	Decide whether to establish a dedicated RSP Committee or adapt an existing committee, and specify local board, IMSB, CG, ARTC and CCO interfaces.	Committee options paper and draft ToR.
Process agreement	Prepare a single-council process agreement that functions as a council-group and partner compact.	Draft process agreement / operating protocol.
Secretariat model	Design an enterprise programme office with GIS/evidence, governance, engagement, legal, transport, infrastructure, and implementation functions.	Secretariat structure, resourcing, and mandate.
Auckland evidence base	Audit Auckland Plan, FDS, AUP, PC120, HBA, hazards, infrastructure, climate, Māori, transport, and coastal datasets against the core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D, together with applicable Schedule 2 process and evidence mechanisms.	Sections 67B–67D evidence gap analysis.
Transport integration	Align RSP establishment with ARTC, 30-year transport plan, RLTP and transport function transfer to Auckland Council.	Joint RSP-transport assumptions and sequencing protocol.
Māori partnering/participation	Map mana whenua, IMSB, mataawaka interfaces where relevant, iwi planning documents, statutory acknowledgements, sites of significance and customary marine interests.	Auckland Māori participation and evidence architecture.
Local board engagement	Design local board input points for early issues, draft scenarios, options, local evidence, and implementation priorities.	Local board engagement and reporting pathway.
Infrastructure and funding alignment	Identify growth/infrastructure sequencing decisions that must connect to LTP, infrastructure strategy, Watercare, transport, energy, and CG investment.	Infrastructure dependency and investment alignment register.
Uncertainty management	Record assumptions about final Bill provisions, national direction, national standards, transport reform timing, and Auckland-specific housing settings.	Assumptions, risks, and review-trigger register.

	Add NPD/national-standard scenarios, standardised RSP provisions, s 74 review triggers and MWAR transition.	
Committee constitution and ToR uplift	Confirm the legal route for Auckland's RSP Committee or committee-equivalent and draft ToR covering Planning Bill functions, CG interface, IHP, implementation plan, local-board inputs, and adoption/reporting steps.	RSP Committee constitution and ToR uplift paper.
Central government representation model	Seek early clarity on how the Ministerial appointee, officials group, CG secretariat input, NZTA/Waka Kotahi, and any RPSC/convenor role will operate in Auckland.	Auckland CG interface and escalation protocol.
Process agreement as council-group compact	Draft the process agreement as a public-facing process statement covering internal council roles and external partners, not merely as a compliance note.	Auckland RSP process agreement / council-group and partner protocol.
National-instrument interface	Create an Auckland enterprise function for NPD/national-standard analysis, standardised RSP provisions, spatial/parameter choices, and rapid committee/secretariat change control.	National-instrument control and decision protocol.

7. Key risks and mitigation focus

Mitigate the downstream implementation gap by treating the sections 73B-73D implementation plan - not the former coordination-document concept - as a core Auckland programme output with named actions, owners, timing, funding status, annual monitoring, and review triggers. Section 68 then links the RSP directly to LUP/NEP, RLTP, GPS and LTP processes.

Risk	Why it matters in Auckland	Mitigation focus
Treating Auckland as already ready	Auckland has strong spatial planning assets, but the Bill creates a new statutory instrument and process.	Explicit transition plan from Auckland Plan/FDS/AUP to Planning Bill RSP as a new tool in a new system.
Fragmented council-group delivery	RSP issues cut across transport, water, stormwater, development, climate, local boards, CCOs and finance.	Enterprise programme office and sponsor group with clear escalation powers.
Transport/RSP misalignment	Transport reform creates a parallel 30-year transport planning system at the same time as RSP establishment.	Shared governance interface and common assumptions between RSP Committee, ARTC and transport/infrastructure teams.
Overly metropolitan focus	Auckland includes rural, coastal, island, Hauraki Gulf, and productive land issues.	Ensure spatial priorities cover the whole Auckland region, not only the compact urban core.
Insufficient Māori partnering/participation design	Planning Bill duties must sit alongside Auckland's existing Māori statutory architecture and multiple mana whenua interests.	Early participation map, resourcing assumptions, and committee/advisory interface decisions.
Evidence overload without synthesis	Auckland has large amounts of data, but not all will be current, consistent, or sufficient to support the core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D.	Minimum viable evidence standard, confidence ratings, and a clear evidence governance model.

Local board disconnect	Local boards may carry important place evidence and community legitimacy, but the RSP is region-wide.	Structured local board engagement without creating fragmented decision rights.
Downstream implementation gap	The RSP is intended to affect land use, natural environment, transport, and LTP decisions.	Implementation actions, lead agency assignments, and Implementation plans built from the start.
Assuming unitary authority status removes process-agreement need	Auckland may under-specify the statutory operating model because there is no multi-council negotiation.	Prepare a public process agreement/process statement that records internal role allocation and external CG, adjacent-region, iwi/Māori, infrastructure, sector, and community arrangements.
Using a BAU committee without statutory uplift	A general strategy committee may not be designed for options assessment, IHP interface, Ministerial appointee, Implementation plans, or RSP adoption/reporting steps.	Prepare specific ToR clauses for Planning Bill functions, voting/advisory roles, CG interface, conflicts, local-board inputs, and council approval pathways.
Fragmented CG and NZTA interface	Auckland's RSP may involve multiple CG portfolios and NZTA roles as transport investor, technical agency, state-highway/designating authority, and possible committee participant.	Separate the whole-of-government position from NZTA's portfolio roles and create an officials group, CG secretariat input, and Ministerial escalation route.
Auckland over-invests in bespoke RSP drafting before standards settle	National standards may prescribe plan structure, methods, and standardised provisions, making some locally developed work redundant.	Prioritise durable evidence, spatial alternatives, and implementation choices; maintain a national-instrument register and defer avoidable bespoke text.
MWAR transition is treated as a minor legal tidy-up	Auckland's complex Māori governance/relationship system could experience gaps if the former mechanism is assumed to continue.	Prepare an explicit transition map separating Auckland-specific statutory architecture, Treaty/JMA duties, direct RSP consultation and any new iwi participation agreement.

8. Key points for council managers to note

Suggested framing: "Auckland does not need to learn regional spatial planning from scratch, but it does need to convert Auckland's existing spatial planning system into a statutory RSP operating model."

No.	Briefing point	Talk-to note
1	Auckland is included in the national RSP regime.	The Planning Bill requires a regional spatial plan for each region and expressly provides an Auckland-specific repeal trigger for Part 6 of the Auckland Council Act once the first Auckland RSP is adopted.
2	Unitary authority status simplifies only one part of the task.	Auckland avoids multi-council bargaining, but the internal council-group, local board, CCO, infrastructure and CG interfaces are very large.
3	The Auckland Plan is a platform, not the new RSP.	Existing Auckland spatial planning provides evidence, narrative, and institutional experience, but the Bill creates a new statutory instrument with mandatory content and downstream effect.
4	The RSP will have sharper legal and implementation consequences.	Land use, natural environment, transport, and long-term planning connections make the RSP more than a high-level vision.

5	Transport reform makes alignment urgent.	The ARTC and 30-year transport plan need to be aligned with the RSP from the outset. Growth, intensification, and transport sequencing should not be run as separate strategies.
6	Auckland's committee design still matters.	Auckland needs a committee or committee-equivalent with explicit RSP functions, CG interface, local board pathways, Māori participation, and IHP/adoption capability.
7	The secretariat should be an enterprise PMO.	It needs programme, governance, evidence, GIS, engagement, legal, transport, infrastructure, and implementation-monitoring capability.
8	The RSP must cover the whole Auckland region.	Urban core, rural Auckland, islands, coast, Hauraki Gulf, hazards, infrastructure, Māori interests, and growth corridors all need to be brought into one statutory spatial framework.
9	Existing evidence must be tested against the core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D.	Auckland has a rich evidence base, but the RSP requires a mapped, statutory, hearing-ready evidence structure at an appropriate spatial scale.
10	Bottom line for managers.	Treat Auckland RSP establishment as a whole-of-council-group transition programme, not simply as an update of the Auckland Plan.
11	Auckland still needs the Planning Bill organisational machinery.	Unitary authority status simplifies inter-council negotiation but does not remove the need for a process agreement/process statement, RSP Committee, chair, secretariat, IHP pathway and implementation plan.
12	The process agreement looks different, not unnecessary.	For Auckland it should operate as a council-group and partner compact covering Governing Body, local boards, IMSB/mana whenua, CCOs, CG, adjacent regions, infrastructure providers, and communities.
13	Committee constitution is a statutory design choice.	An existing committee can be used only if its ToR is uplifted for Planning Bill RSP functions, CG interface, public notification, IHP advice, adoption, and implementation reporting.
14	The secretariat should include CG and enterprise capability.	Auckland needs an enterprise PMO with planning, evidence, transport, infrastructure, legal, engagement, local-board, and IHP capability, plus a clear CG secretariat interface.
15	NZTA is central but not the whole CG.	NZTA should be integrated into transport, RLTP, investment, state-highway, and designation workstreams, but the whole-of-government position needs a broader mandate and clearance process.
16	Auckland's scale does not displace national standardisation.	National standards may prescribe RSP provisions/methods; Auckland should focus governance attention on the spatial, sequencing and parameter choices left open.
17	The Auckland Act transition trigger is now explicit.	Part 6 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 ceases on the date specified in the public notice adopting Auckland's first RSP.
18	MWAR transition needs Auckland-specific management.	Plan for cessation after Royal assent while preserving IMSB/mana whenua/Treaty/JMA/direct RSP duties and considering any later iwi participation agreement separately.
19	Use the Illustrative NPD as a test, not a mandate.	Its growth/infrastructure/hazard themes are useful for scenario testing, but Auckland should retain flexibility until statutory NPD and standards are made.

10. Bottom line for managers

Auckland's future regional spatial plan should not be approached as a straightforward refresh of the Auckland Plan or as a minor adjustment to the Auckland Unitary Plan. It is a transition to a new statutory spatial planning

instrument that will sit at the front end of Auckland's land use, natural environment, transport, and investment planning system.

The management task is to use Auckland's head start - unitary authority status, Auckland Plan, Future Development Strategy, Unitary Plan, data capability, transport reform, and existing Māori/statutory arrangements - while designing a new RSP operating model with enough authority, evidence discipline, partner participation, committee clarity, and secretariat capability to carry statutory weight.

The additional point from the updated briefing series is that Auckland's head start must be converted into Planning Bill machinery. The test is not whether Auckland can prepare another spatial strategy, but whether it can stand up a statutory RSP operating model with a public process agreement, a properly constituted committee, an enterprise secretariat, a collective CG interface and a defensible implementation pathway.

Appendix: Practical checklist for Auckland managers

Checklist area	Question for managers
Transition architecture	Have we mapped how Auckland Plan, FDS, AUP, PC120 and Auckland Council Act Part 6 transition into the first Auckland RSP?
Governance model	Is there a preferred RSP Committee model with clear relationship to Governing Body, local boards, IMSB, CG appointees, ARTC and council-group entities?
Process agreement	Does the process agreement function as a council-group and partner operating protocol, not just a statutory formality?
Secretariat	Is the secretariat designed as an enterprise programme office with planning, infrastructure, transport, GIS, legal, engagement, and implementation capability?
Māori partnering/participation	Have mana whenua, IMSB, mataawaka interfaces where relevant, iwi planning documents, statutory acknowledgements, Māori sites, and coastal/customary interests been mapped?
Local boards	Are local board roles and input points specified for issues, scenarios, options, draft plan, and implementation?
Transport interface	Are ARTC, 30-year transport plan, RLTP and RSP work programmes aligned around shared assumptions and sequencing?
Evidence and GIS	Has existing Auckland evidence been tested against the core RSP obligations in sections 67B–67D, including currency, confidence, spatial scale, and hearing readiness?
Infrastructure and funding	Are Watercare, transport, energy, social infrastructure, CG investment, and LTP linkages built into the RSP work programme?
Whole-region coverage	Does the RSP programme explicitly cover rural Auckland, islands, coastal and Hauraki Gulf matters as well as the metropolitan core?
Implementation	Are likely RSP implementation actions, lead agencies, LTP/RLTP links and implementation plan responsibilities being identified from the start?
Uncertainty management	Is there an assumptions and review-trigger register for final Bill changes, national direction, transport reform, Auckland housing settings, and budget cycles?
Process agreement / process statement	Does Auckland have a public-facing process agreement that records council-group roles, committee/secretariat arrangements, CG, adjacent-region, iwi/Māori, infrastructure, sector, and community engagement?
Committee statutory uplift	If an existing committee is used, have its ToR been amended to cover Planning Bill RSP functions, public notification, IHP advice, Implementation plans, CG interface, and implementation reporting?

CG secretariat input	Has Auckland specified how central government will be part of or aligned with the RSP secretariat?
NZTA and collective CG distinction	Have NZTA's transport, RLTP, investment, state-highway and designating-authority roles been separated from any broader whole-of-government representative role?
Voting/advisory pathways	If the RSP Committee uses non-elected appointees or partner participants, has Auckland tested voting, quorum, advisory and influence mechanisms against proposed LGA voting-rights changes and any statutory exceptions?
National-standard interface	Can Auckland identify nationally fixed standardised RSP content, implement prescribed methods and focus governance on authorised spatial/parameter choices?
Auckland Act transition	Is Schedule 1 cl 10 built into the adoption/public-notice transition plan for Part 6 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009?
MWAR / iwi participation transition	Has Auckland mapped MWAR cessation against IMSB, mana whenua, Treaty/JMA/direct RSP duties and any future request-based iwi participation agreement?

Source documents and official references

Primary source documents (prepared by SMConsulting)

1. Info Paper - RMA Replacement Spatial Planning Implementation - Detailed Notes, 18 March 2026
2. Discuss Paper - Enabling organisational readiness for regional spatial planning, 20 March 2026
3. Info Paper - Planning and Natural Environment Bills - Implementation Risk Synthesis incl. Spatial Planning, 23 March 2026
4. Info paper - RMA Instruments and Governance Transition to Spatial Planning, 27 March 2026
5. Info Paper - Regional spatial planning - New Zealand Councils stocktake v. Spatial Planning – Updated, 29 March 2026
6. Info Paper - How the Planning Bill Applies to Auckland's Spatial Planning, 5 May 2026
7. Regional Spatial Planning under the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill - Legal commentary and implementation implications, as at 14 September 2026: current synthesis used for the further interpretive and organisational edits in this Note.

Official references

8. New Zealand Legislation, Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
9. New Zealand Legislation, Natural Environment Bill 234-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/234/en/latest/>
10. New Zealand Legislation, Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2009/0032/latest/whole.html>
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12. Ministry for the Environment, Better planning for a better New Zealand - <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/better-planning-for-a-better-new-zealand/>
13. Ministry for the Environment, Resource Management (Auckland Housing) Amendment Act 2026 - <https://environment.govt.nz/acts-and-regulations/legislation/resource-management-auckland-housing-amendment-act/>
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15. Auckland Council / Our Auckland, Transport reform reaches another major milestone, 7 May 2026 - <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2026/05/transport-reform-reaches-another-major-milestone/>
16. Knowledge Auckland, Auckland Plan 2050 Three Yearly Progress Report 2025 - <https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/publications/auckland-plan-2050-three-yearly-progress-report-2025/>

17. Auckland Transport, Final transport reform legislation communication, 1 May 2026 - <https://at.govt.nz/media/3pdlh4ee/auckland-transport-final-transport-reform-legislation.pdf>
18. DIA Guidance for Head Start outline proposals released on 29 May 2026
[https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/Local-Government-2026/\\$file/Guidance-for-Head-Start-outline-proposals.pdf](https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/Local-Government-2026/$file/Guidance-for-Head-Start-outline-proposals.pdf)

September 2026 legislative-update status and sources

19. Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026: consolidated current pre-third-reading text incorporating the report-back and Committee-stage amendments - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
20. Climate Change Response Amendment Bill 2026 (Bill 334-1), introduced 15 July 2026, remains a separate legislative source stream. For this RSP briefing, Planning Bill 235-3 is now the primary statutory baseline and itself requires priority areas for planning adaptation to climate-change effects.
21. Planning Bill 235-3, Schedule 1 clause 21 and sections 198A-198E: all existing and initiated Mana Whakahono ā Rohe cease to have legal effect on the day after Royal assent; one or more iwi authorities may request one or more local authorities to enter iwi participation agreements, with hapū able to join as parties. Direct RSP consultation and Treaty-settlement duties remain separate.
22. MCERT, New Zealand's New Planning System - Testing the Approach to National Policy Direction, 25 August 2026: illustrative material, expressly not Government policy, used only as an implementation signal for likely RSP emphasis on growth/infrastructure sequencing, natural hazards, environmental/cultural values, and conflict resolution.