

Regional Spatial Planning Roadshow

Briefing Note 1: Working Regionally for Regional Spatial Planning – Issues and Options for Council Managers

July - August 2026



Working Regionally for Regional Spatial Planning – Issues and Options for Council Managers

This Briefing Note is framed to support a 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 a series of eight Briefing Notes on topics relevant to organisational readiness for regional spatial planning. It includes information and advice based on official sources but developed by Taituarā as an advisory Briefing Note.

Its statutory framing is the Planning Bill provisions as introduced to Parliament on regional spatial plans, process agreements, iwi consultation, spatial plan committees, public notification, hearings, adoption, review, and coordination documents. It considers regional spatial planning under the Planning Bill – what it means for council managers, in light of existing spatial planning collaborations and wider regional collaboration experience.

1. Executive Summary

Existing spatial planning collaborations are valuable starting platforms, but they are not substitutes for the Planning Bill's Regional Spatial Plan (RSP) operating model. The central shift is from voluntary, urban-growth or sub-regional collaboration toward a mandatory, region-wide statutory planning architecture that requires councils to work together through formal process agreements, committee terms of reference, a secretariat, shared evidence systems, public notification, and independent hearing processes.

For council managers, “working regionally” therefore means more than convening another strategy forum. It means designing the regional operating machinery that will allow elected members, iwi/Māori, central government, infrastructure providers, communities, and council staff to make strategic spatial choices at pace, while existing RMA plans, consenting, Long-Term Plan cycles and other reforms continue.

Readiness and stocktake papers point to the same practical conclusion: the success of first-generation RSPs will depend as much on organisational design, sponsorship, programme discipline, and collaboration readiness as on planning technique. Regions that already have SmartGrowth-style, Greater Christchurch-style, Future Proof, Wellington Regional Growth Framework or FDS experience are not starting from zero. But most existing arrangements are partial by geography, voluntary or strategic in effect, and narrower in mandatory content than the Planning Bill model.

Updates to the RSP Committee and Head Start notes sharpen the same point. Working regionally now needs to be understood as transition-capable institution building: current regional boundaries remain the immediate RSP establishment baseline, but the operating model must be capable of absorbing Head Start decisions, reconstituting committee membership if required, preserving evidence and participation commitments, and maintaining regional-function coherence.

The Central Government (CG) interface also needs to be treated as part of the regional operating model. A single Ministerial appointee or agency observer may not be enough on its own. Regions with CG will need to design how a collective central-government position is formed and how central government participates in the secretariat. The newly formed Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport (MCERT) is the current and future central-government coordination point for RSP work and early engagement with MCERT is advised. The design may include how NZTA/Waka Kotahi participates as transport investor, designating authority and technical agency, and how any Regional Public Service Commissioner role is mandated and connected to portfolio agencies.

2. What councils need to know now

2.1 The first task is agreeing how the region will work, not drafting the plan

The Planning Bill puts process agreements, spatial plan committees, secretariats, local authority approval steps, options assessment, and public notification into the formal RSP machinery. That makes the early establishment phase a management task in its own right. Councils need to agree the operating model before the region can confidently commission evidence, prepare scenarios, engage partners, or brief elected members. To progress this senior council leadership needs to be engaged, relationships developed and compromises reached.

The 29 May DIA Head Start guidance adds a practical formation discipline: do not pause current-boundary RSP work while restructuring options are tested, but make the process agreement, committee ToR, and secretariat model explicit about assumptions, review triggers, reconstitution, and regional-function continuity.

Establishment matter	What needs to be agreed regionally	Managerial implication
Regional mandate	Who is convening the councils; how the CE Forum, Mayoral Forum, existing joint committees, and individual councils relate to the RSP process.	Do not rely on goodwill alone. Record the convening pathway, escalation route, and decision dates.
Process agreement	Scope, roles, geographic focus, adjacent-region matters, iwi consultation, infrastructure and sector engagement, public involvement, change control and review triggers. Also specify iwi/Māori partnering/participation, Head Start change-control, current-boundary continuity, funding/voting assumptions and how central-government advice will be coordinated.	Treat the process agreement as the operating constitution for the pre-notification phase. Use the process agreement as the operating spine and continuity mechanism, not just a statutory checklist.
Committee terms of reference	Committee role, membership, chairing, relation to all councils, Minister-appointed members, voting/non-voting status if applicable, conflict management, delegations, and reporting. Include current-boundary continuity, Head Start	Design for clarity before contested choices arise.

Establishment matter	What needs to be agreed regionally	Managerial implication
	reconstitution, LGA voting-rights assumptions, central-government/NZTA/RPSC interfaces and partner reporting pathways.	Use the ToR to expose difficult design choices early rather than allowing passive defaults.
Secretariat and programme office	Host model, staffing, records, reporting, procurement, evidence commissioning, meeting support, issue/risk control, communications, and document control. Include transition monitoring, CG secretariat input, evidence-transfer controls, and support for CE/senior-executive steering.	The secretariat is the engine room. Under-resourcing it creates governance risk. Treat the secretariat as a senior regional programme office able to operate across political, executive, and technical levels.
Evidence and digital system	Common data standards, spatial layers, confidence ratings, scenario assumptions, GIS/document platforms, records, and public access.	Agree minimum viable evidence standards early rather than letting each council build separate systems.
Implementation link	How the RSP connects to LTPs, infrastructure strategies, regional land transport plans, natural environment plans, and land-use plans.	The RSP must be designed as a delivery-facing instrument, not simply a policy narrative.
Head Start / current-boundary continuity	How current regional boundaries will remain the immediate RSP establishment baseline, while assumptions and reconstitution triggers deal with accepted, altered, rejected, or legislated Head Start proposals.	Do not pause RSP formation for Head Start; build transition-capable machinery now.
Collective central-government interface	How the Ministerial appointee, central-agency officials group, CG secretariat presence will work together.	Avoid treating one agency or one person as the whole CG unless there is an explicit mandate and clearance process.

2.2 Existing spatial planning collaboration is an asset, but not the end-state

Current spatial-plan-like documents provide important evidence, relationships, and methods. Future Development Strategies bring urban growth sequencing and infrastructure alignment. Partnership spatial plans and growth frameworks bring cross-council habits, governance forums, technical groups, and community narratives. District-scale spatial plans bring local place-based insight and scenario testing. However, the Planning Bill's RSP has a different statutory role and wider coverage.

Existing asset	What it contributes	What still has to change for RSP
Future Development Strategies under the NPS-UD	Urban growth sequencing, development capacity, infrastructure timing, consultation, and hearing experience.	Needs to be widened beyond the urban environment and integrated into a region-wide statutory spatial plan with Schedule 2 mandatory matters.
Voluntary regional or sub-regional growth frameworks	Relationships, joint governance practices, shared evidence, strategic narrative, and infrastructure alignment habits.	Needs statutory terms of reference, committee/secretariat functions, stronger implementation links, and formal process steps.

Existing asset	What it contributes	What still has to change for RSP
District or unitary authority spatial plans	Local place-based analysis, community views, growth scenarios, spatial priorities, and constraint mapping.	Needs scaling or translation into the regional framework, with explicit adjacent-region and partner interfaces.
Regional transport and CDEM-style collaborations	Familiarity with mayor/chair regional forums, joint committees, multi-agency plans and escalation processes.	RSP differs because it allocates strategic spatial choices that downstream land use, environmental and investment planning must implement.
E.g., Queenstown Lakes / Central Otago and other place-based or corridor spatial planning	Place-based growth, infrastructure, tourism, housing, and landscape/hazard evidence, often with strong partner and agency involvement.	Useful as a regional input, but still needs translation into a statutory, whole-region RSP with consistent evidence and formal governance.
Urban growth partnerships with CG involvement	Experience with central government, transport investment, business cases, and infrastructure sequencing.	The CG role must now be formalised through process agreements, committee/secretariat arrangements and workstream protocols rather than relying only on partnership practice.

2.3 The RSP Committee needs deliberate organisational design

The Planning Bill requires local authorities in each region to work together to provide terms of reference to a spatial plan committee. It also provides for appointment of a chair and secretariat in accordance with regulations and gives the committee roles including preparing the draft RSP, preparing an options assessment report, consulting, recommending the draft plan to local authorities for notification, advising on Independent Hearings Panel recommendations, and reviewing/amending the RSP. This is a more formal role than many current growth partnerships.

Managers should therefore avoid treating the committee as a standard advisory group. It is better understood as a regional strategy and plan-making body that needs a clear operating interface with every local authority in the region, with central government, with iwi/Māori participation arrangements, with infrastructure providers, and with the later hearing and adoption stages.

The updated Briefing Note No. 5 also indicates that the ToR should now cover current-boundary continuity, Head Start reconstitution triggers, proposed LGA voting-rights constraints, collective central-government representation, NZTA/Waka Kotahi's separate transport/investment/designating-authority roles, and the possible but not automatic role of Regional Public Service Commissioners.

2.4 The secretariat is a core capability, not administrative support

The secretariat should be designed as a regional programme and governance support function. It must be able to manage the work programme, service the committee, maintain records, commission and quality-assure evidence, support options/scenario work, coordinate partner engagement, manage risks/issues, produce reporting to councils, and maintain document integrity through public notification and hearings.

The secretariat will require senior-level capability that is strategic and able to operate at political, chief executive and technical levels. It should not be positioned as a meeting-administration unit. The Supplementary Analysis Report also indicates that central government must be part of spatial plan secretariats, which reinforces the need to design a CG secretariat interface alongside local-government programme capability.

Secretariat function	Why it matters	Early design question
Governance servicing	The committee will need reliable agendas, papers, minutes, decision logs, and advice across multiple councils.	Who hosts, who funds, and how are records owned and accessed?
Programme control	RSP timeframes are compressed and interdependent with national direction, hearings, and later plans.	Is there a single integrated programme plan, risk register, and dependency log?
Evidence commissioning	Schedule 2 content requires coherent spatial data, options, scenarios, and confidence in technical evidence.	Who can commission region-wide evidence and avoid duplication?
Partner coordination	Iwi/Māori, infrastructure providers, CG agencies, adjacent regions, and communities need predictable engagement pathways.	How are stakeholder commitments tracked and escalated?
Information management	Public notification, IHP recommendations and adoption require clear document control.	What system will hold the evidence base, GIS layers, versions, and submissions?
Transition monitoring	Head Start, Bill changes, national instruments and local-government structural change can alter assumptions while RSP work proceeds.	Who maintains the assumptions register, Head Start/RSP continuity note and evidence-transfer log?
Central-government secretariat interface	The SAR indicates central government must be part of spatial plan secretariats.	How will CG officials, agency inputs, and Ministerial escalation be coordinated through the secretariat?

2.5 Readiness is regional: no council can be fully ready alone

The four-region readiness pilot shows that readiness as at April 2026 varies significantly. Observed differences matter because the RSP process will be only as strong as the weakest unresolved parts of the regional operating system.

Readiness should also be tested against relevant Head Start scenarios from the four considered in Note No. 2: full-region unitary authority, subregional unitary authority, cross-current-regional-boundary unitary authority, and multiple unitary authorities within one present region. The working-region model should remain current-boundary based unless legislation later provides otherwise, but it should be capable of transfer, continuity, or reconstitution.

Readiness lesson from the pilot	Management implication
Recognition is not mobilisation.	A triennial agreement, framework report or workshop is useful only if converted into named sponsorship, workstreams, resourcing and decision dates.
Governance uncertainty is the dominant constraint.	Regions need lawful interim arrangements that can operate before enactment and adapt when final legislation/regulations are known.
Secretariat capability is uneven.	Managers should decide early whether the region needs a hosted secretariat, distributed secretariat, contracted programme manager, or hybrid model.

Readiness lesson from the pilot	Management implication
Small council capacity is a regional risk.	Participation should not assume equal staff depth. Regions need capability heatmaps, secondments, shared services, or procurement support.
Iwi/Māori and partner capacity is a readiness dependency.	Participation, not just council capacity, needs resourcing assumptions and a practical programme.
Digital and evidence standards cannot wait indefinitely.	Regions should agree “minimum viable evidence” and metadata practices even while national digital settings remain uncertain.
Regional leadership requires early cadence.	CEs and senior executives may need a high-frequency steering role in early phases to maintain momentum and resolve design issues before statutory pressure builds.
Head Start makes readiness transition-capable.	Readiness should be tested against full-region, subregional, cross-boundary and multiple-UA scenarios, while keeping current-boundary RSP establishment moving.
Central government interface is a readiness dependency.	Regions need to know how the CG position will be formed and how NZTA, RPSCs and portfolio agencies will participate before committee and secretariat design is locked in.

3. What is different with RSPs under the Planning Bill?

The Planning Bill does not simply turn existing Future Development Strategies or growth frameworks into statutory plans. It changes scale, status, content, governance, process, and downstream effect. The updated Briefing Note No. 5 adds three further differences to keep visible: first, central government may be represented on the committee but must be part of the secretariat; second, Head Start proposals should not rebase the first-generation RSP region at outline stage; and third, proposed LGA voting-rights amendments may affect whether non-elected appointed members can vote on an LGA-based RSP Committee.

Dimension	Existing spatial planning collaborations	Planning Bill RSP implications
Legal status	Often strategic, voluntary, LGA-based, NPS-UD FDS-based or partnership-led; influential but not usually a statutory plan in the same sense as a planning instrument.	The RSP is a statutory component of the new regional planning architecture and sits above later land-use and natural environment plans.
Geographic scale	Frequently urban-environment, district or sub-regional: e.g., Greater Christchurch, SmartGrowth, Future Proof, WRGF, Nelson-Tasman FDS, Dunedin FDS, Queenstown Lakes Spatial Plan.	The RSP is region-wide, including wider rural, coastal, hazard, infrastructure, environmental and adjacent-region issues.
Mandatory content	Usually strong on growth, housing, infrastructure, and sequencing, but variable on environmental limits, coastal rights, Treaty settlement layers, and adaptation priorities.	Schedule 2 requires mandatory spatial matters including constraints, environmental-limit implications, future urban development, key infrastructure, adaptation locations, separation of incompatible uses, development patterns, statutory acknowledgements, sites of significance to Māori and customary marine title/protected customary rights areas.
Implementation hierarchy	Existing plans often influence RMA changes, LTPs and infrastructure	Land-use plans, natural environment plans, transport, and LGA engagement provisions are

Dimension	Existing spatial planning collaborations	Planning Bill RSP implications
	decisions, but their effect varies by region and instrument.	intended to align with or take account of the RSP to the extent provided in legislation.
Committee and secretariat	Partnership boards or joint committees can be flexible, informal, or bespoke.	The Bill requires formal spatial plan committee arrangements and a secretariat, with roles linked to statutory process steps.
Central government role	Central agencies may participate in some growth partnerships but usually by agreement or programme design.	The Bill provides for Ministerial appointment to spatial plan committees and decision roles in specified circumstances. <i>The updated SAR/Committee Note distinction is sharper: central government may be on the committee but must be part of the secretariat. A collective CG operating model is therefore needed.</i>
Iwi/Māori and coastal rights	Participation varies by region and instrument; many current growth strategies are not built around mandatory Treaty/coastal-rights layers.	The Bill specifies consultation and evidence duties and requires treatment of identified Māori land, iwi planning documents, statutory acknowledgements, and customary marine title/protected customary rights matters.
Public process	Existing strategies use consultation or special consultative procedures to varying degrees.	The RSP process includes public notification, written submissions, an Independent Hearings Panel process, recommendations, and adoption steps.
Evidence standard	Evidence bases vary and may be fit for strategic growth planning but not complete for a statutory regional spatial plan.	The region will need a documented evidence base, scenario/options assessment, uncertainty management, and consistency with national instruments.
Management challenge	Collaboration can be issue-specific, urban-focused, or time-limited.	RSP requires a durable whole-of-region operating model with programme, governance, financial, data, legal and engagement capability.
Head Start and planning geography	Existing collaborations usually assume stable council and regional boundaries.	For outline-proposal purposes, current Bill-introduction regions remain the immediate RSP baseline. Head Start scenarios require continuity, reconstitution, and regional-function protections rather than delay.
Voting and participation design	Existing partnership structures may use appointed members, advisory bodies, or bespoke forums.	Proposed LGA voting-rights changes mean committee voting, quorum, iwi/Māori influence pathways, and statutory/Treaty exceptions need legal testing.

4. Key insights from existing spatial planning and other collaborations

The existing spatial planning stocktake, and wider project material suggest that several collaboration lessons should be carried into RSP establishment. These are not “nice to have” process points. They affect whether a statutory committee can function when it must work through choices about growth, infrastructure corridors, hazards, environmental limits, adaptation, rural/urban trade-offs, and public investment priorities.

Experienced spatial planning leaders engaged in Roadshow presentations emphasise that regional leadership will need to be active and frequent early in the process. CE Forums or equivalent senior-executive steering

groups may need to meet at short intervals in early establishment phases, because unresolved governance, funding, secretariat, and partner-interface choices will otherwise drift into the statutory plan-making phase.

Insight	Why it matters	Application to RSP readiness
Relationships are regional infrastructure.	Existing growth partnerships show that trust, meeting rhythms, and shared language are built over years, not after notification.	Inventory existing forums and decide what is retained, widened, repurposed, or retired.
Voluntary collaboration works best before distributional choices become sharp.	When choices affect growth allocation, infrastructure costs, hazard exposure or environmental trade-offs, soft consensus can break down.	Build escalation, dispute resolution and decision pathways into the process agreement and committee ToR.
Sub-regional success does not automatically scale.	Greater Christchurch, SmartGrowth and Future Proof-style arrangements are powerful but do not cover all regional interests.	Create sub-regional working groups where useful, but anchor them in a single regional programme and evidence base.
Mayoral/CE sponsorship needs an operational engine.	Regional political forums can provide mandate, but they cannot manage evidence, workstreams, dependencies and documents.	Stand up a programme/secretariat function with clear authority and reporting lines.
Existing evidence is valuable but uneven.	FDSs and growth strategies provide a base, but Schedule 2 requires wider matters and consistent regional treatment.	Run an evidence gap analysis against mandatory RSP matters, including confidence and currency of data.
Small councils and smaller partners need equity of participation.	Some councils and partners have limited staff depth, and participation burdens may fall unevenly.	Use capability heatmaps, shared support, secondments, and clear expectations about contribution.
Other regional committees show the value of clear statutory roles.	Regional Transport Committees and CDEM Joint Committees show how regional committees can create durable governance habits.	Learn from their meeting discipline and escalation channels, but do not assume their mandate or membership is sufficient for RSP.
Implementation links must be designed from day one.	Existing strategies can lose force when not tied to budgets and statutory instruments.	Map the RSP-to-LTP, infrastructure strategy, RLTP, land-use plan and natural environment plan connections early.
Senior regional leadership must be matched with delivery capacity.	Mayors, chairs, CEs, and senior executives can set direction, but the secretariat must be able to translate this into papers, evidence, decision logs, and escalation.	Create a CE/senior-executive advisory or steering layer and resource the secretariat accordingly.
First-generation RSPs need realistic evidence discipline.	Given timeframes and Head Start complexity, the first plan will likely draw together what is largely already known, while identifying gaps and confidence levels.	Audit existing evidence for fitness-for-purpose rather than pursuing perfect new evidence before governance is in place.
The CG interface must be designed, not assumed.	Spatial choices may affect national infrastructure, transport, housing, environment, fiscal and Treaty interests.	Set up a collective-government officials group, CG secretariat input, and escalation pathway behind any Ministerial appointee.

5. Organisational design implications for functioning RSP Committees

The RSP Committee should be designed as part of a wider regional operating model rather than as a stand-alone committee. The model needs to connect political ownership, chief executive sponsorship, programme control, technical evidence, iwi/Māori participation, infrastructure/CG involvement, public process, and later implementation.

The operating model should now be tested as a whole system: elected-member governance, iwi/Māori partnership/participation, central-government representation, NZTA and infrastructure-provider interfaces, Head Start continuity, regional-function architecture, and secretariat capability all need to fit together. A weakness in any one of these will show up as delay, rework, or legitimacy risk later.

Operating model component	What needs to be designed	Manager questions
Regional sponsorship	Named executive sponsor or sponsor group; relationship to CE Forum and Mayoral Forum; reporting cadence.	Who can unblock issues between councils quickly?
Committee terms of reference	Role, powers, functions, membership, chair, Minister-appointed member interface, voting status, quorum, conflicts, code of conduct and reporting.	What decisions can the committee make, recommend, or escalate?
Council approval pathway	How committee recommendations flow to every local authority for approval to notify and adoption decisions.	How will inconsistent council positions be managed?
Secretariat / PMO	Host, staffing, budget, procurement powers, records, meeting support, advice drafting, risk management, and document control.	Is the secretariat funded and authorised to run a regional programme?
Technical/evidence architecture	Spatial data layers, scenario assumptions, methodology, evidence gap analysis, metadata, confidence ratings, quality assurance, and peer review.	What is “good enough” evidence for the first RSP?
Partner and stakeholder architecture	Iwi/Māori participation, infrastructure providers, CG agencies, adjoining regions, developers, rural sector, community groups, and public participation.	Who is engaged when, on what, and with what resourcing support?
Sub-regional structures	Where sub-regional groups are needed for urban systems, catchments, corridors, or communities of interest.	How do sub-regional outputs feed the single regional plan?
Workforce and capability model	Core team, secondees, council contributors, consultants, legal, GIS, planning, infrastructure, hazards, engagement, and communications roles.	Which BAU work stops, slows, or transfers while RSP work peaks?
Financial model	Cost sharing, annual plan/LTP timing, procurement, central funding assumptions, and contingency.	Can councils legally and politically fund the work when costs crystallise?
Learning and adaptation	Issue log, change-control process, review triggers, feedback loops, and route for raising system issues with MfE/Taituarā.	How will the region adapt if the Bill, regulations, or national direction change?

Operating model component	What needs to be designed	Manager questions
Head Start continuity model	Working geography, four-scenario testing, reconstitution triggers, Regional Function Continuity Schedule, and evidence transfer rules.	How will the operating model survive accepted, rejected, altered, or legislated Head Start proposals?
Collective central-government model	Ministerial appointee, officials group, CG secretariat input, agency clearance process, and Ministerial escalation.	How is the CG position formed, authorised, communicated, and escalated?
NZTA / transport-investment interface	NZTA technical evidence, RLTP and business-case inputs, state highway and designation interests, and Board/investment decision protocols.	When is NZTA speaking as transport agency, investor, designating authority, or possible CG appointee?
Iwi/Māori partnering and voting-rights pathway	Consultation, advisory or governance roles, Treaty settlement continuity, proposed LGA voting constraints and legally durable influence mechanisms.	Does the chosen committee route rely on non-elected voting rights, and what happens if those are unavailable?

6. Immediate work programme for council managers

Councils do not need to wait for every legal and national-direction question to be resolved before taking no-regrets establishment steps. The key is to design arrangements that are useful now but can be adapted when final statutory settings are known.

In practical terms, the no-regrets work programme should now include a current-boundary RSP continuity statement, relevant Head Start scenarios impact test, CG agency and investment interface map, central-government representation note, and draft ToR clauses on reconstitution, voting rights, secretariat authority, and Ministerial escalation.

Workstream	No-regrets action now	Output
Regional collaboration map	Map existing spatial planning, transport, CDEM, infrastructure and growth forums; identify what can be reused or needs redesign.	Regional collaboration asset map.
Sponsor and mandate	Secure a CE/Mayoral Forum mandate to develop RSP establishment options and a pre-enactment work programme.	Sponsor statement and decision timetable.
Process agreement	Draft clauses covering roles, scope, adjoining regions, iwi consultation, partner engagement, evidence, secretariat, funding, escalation and change control.	Draft process agreement / heads of agreement.
Interim governance	Develop lawful interim arrangements that can operate before enactment and transition into the statutory committee model.	Interim governance paper for councils.
Secretariat model	Compare hosted, distributed, contracted and hybrid secretariat/PMO options.	Secretariat options paper and resourcing model.
Evidence and data	Audit existing FDS/growth strategy/RMA datasets against Schedule 2 mandatory matters and identify minimum early evidence needs.	Evidence gap analysis and data standard.
Capability and workload	Prepare a heatmap of council and partner capability; identify scarce skills, small council support needs, and BAU trade-offs.	Regional capability and workload reset plan.

Workstream	No-regrets action now	Output
Partner participation	Prepare participation maps for iwi/Māori, infrastructure providers, CG agencies, adjoining regions, and major sector/community interests.	Partner/stakeholder engagement architecture.
Elected member communication	Prepare a common narrative explaining why early organisational decisions matter.	Council manager / elected member briefing pack.
Uncertainty management	Maintain a register of assumptions, legislative dependencies, national direction dependencies, and review triggers.	Assumptions and change-control register.
Current-boundary continuity	Confirm current regional boundaries as the RSP establishment baseline unless legislation provides otherwise; record Head Start assumptions.	Current-boundary RSP continuity statement.
Head Start scenario testing	Test full-region UA, subregional UA, cross-boundary UA and multiple-UAs-in-one-region scenarios against committee, secretariat, evidence, and regional-function arrangements.	Four-scenario RSP impact assessment.
Central government representation	Seek early indication on the preferred CG model: Ministerial appointee, officials group, CG secretariat input, NZTA/RPSC roles and escalation.	Central-government representation note and draft ToR clauses.
CG agency / investment map	Map agencies, CG entities, national plans/strategies, Government policy statements, designating authorities, and CG-funded assets relevant to the RSP.	CG agency and investment interface map.

7. Matters that remain uncertain or need careful watching

The most important uncertainties are no longer only statutory drafting matters. They include how current-boundary RSP work will transition if Head Start proceeds, whether the final LGA voting-rights changes affect committee membership models, how central-government representation will be nationally standardised, and how NZTA/RPSC roles will be differentiated from the formal CG position.

Uncertain matter	Why it matters for working regionally
Final form of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill	Committee functions, process requirements, timeframes, and legal powers may still change before enactment.
National direction and national standards	These will shape evidence needs, content, form, options assessment, digital requirements, and consistency tests.
Regulations on chairing and secretariat arrangements	Section 71 points to chair and secretariat requirements being shaped by regulations, affecting committee design and staffing.
Ministerial appointments and CG role	Ministerial membership and decision roles may affect committee dynamics, voting rights, advice flow, and escalation.
Funding and cost sharing	The statutory obligation is regional, but council budgets, Annual Plans, LTPs and possible rates-capping constraints sit locally.
Digital transition scope	Councils cannot confidently engage IT teams or budget for systems until national digital plan-making and data expectations are clearer.
Status of existing FDS/spatial plan evidence	Existing work may be used, but not all is sufficient for Schedule 2 statutory content, regional scale, or hearing scrutiny.
Small council and partner capacity	Regional arrangements may fail if participation assumes equal capacity across councils, iwi/Māori, infrastructure providers, and other actors.

Uncertain matter	Why it matters for working regionally
Head Start / local government structural change	Potential boundary or unitary authority changes could affect regional functions, committee membership, secretariat models, and partner relationships.
Relationship to LTP, RLTP and infrastructure investment	The RSP is intended to influence investment and transport planning, but practical alignment with budget cycles remains a major management risk.
Current-boundary RSP continuity under Head Start	The immediate RSP baseline is clearer, but future succession, residual-region, cross-boundary, and reconstitution issues still need detailed design.
Proposed LGA voting-rights change	If enacted as announced, ordinary LGA-based committee models may constrain non-elected appointed members voting or counting for quorum.
Collective central-government representation	The Ministerial appointee, CG officials group, secretariat role and escalation pathway may need national guidance to avoid inconsistent regional models.
NZTA and Regional Public Service Commissioner roles	NZTA has transport/investment/designating interests; RPSCs can coordinate regional public service input but are not automatically the statutory CG representative.

8. Key points for council managers to note

Suggested framing: “RSP readiness is not just planning readiness. It is the design of a regional operating model capable of making statutory spatial choices.”

No.	Briefing point	Talk-to note
1	Start with the shift in status.	Existing spatial planning collaborations are useful platforms, but the Planning Bill moves RSP into a mandatory statutory hierarchy with committee, secretariat, hearing, and implementation steps.
2	Working regionally now means institution-building.	The first establishment challenge is to agree how the councils, partners and committee will work before plan drafting starts.
3	Use existing collaborations, but do not overclaim them.	SmartGrowth, WRGF, Greater Christchurch, Future Proof and FDSs provide evidence and relationships; most are not whole-region statutory RSPs. <i>Broaden the examples to include Queenstown Lakes/Central Otago and other place-based or corridor spatial planning where relevant, while still noting that most are not whole-region statutory RSPs.</i>
4	The process agreement is the operating spine.	It should cover roles, scope, adjacent regions, iwi consultation, infrastructure and sector engagement, public process, evidence, escalation, funding and change control. <i>Use “iwi/Māori partnering and consultation” language and include Head Start change-control, funding/voting assumptions, and central-government coordination.</i>
5	The RSP Committee needs a deliberate terms of reference.	Managers should settle committee role, membership, voting/attendance status, reporting to councils, conflicts, chairing, Ministerial interface, and links to the IHP process. <i>The ToR also needs to cover current-boundary continuity, Head Start reconstitution, proposed LGA voting constraints and the collective-government model.</i>

No.	Briefing point	Talk-to note
6	The secretariat is the engine room.	It needs programme, governance, evidence, engagement, records, and risk capability; it is not merely meeting administration. It requires senior strategic capability able to operate with mayors, chairs, CEs, CG officials, iwi/Māori and technical workstreams.
7	Evidence has to become regional and defensible.	Existing FDS/growth/RMA evidence should be audited against Schedule 2 matters, including data currency, gaps, and confidence levels. For a first-generation plan, this will usually mean organising and testing what is already known, while identifying gaps, confidence levels, and transferability.
8	Regional readiness is uneven.	Different councils and regions have different starting points; capability heatmaps and support models are needed so smaller councils are not structurally disadvantaged.
9	Sub-regional structures are useful but must feed one regional plan.	Large regions may need sub-regional workstreams, but the operating model must preserve regional consistency and shared decision-making.
10	Infrastructure and investment alignment cannot be left late.	RSPs are intended to connect land use, infrastructure, transport, and funding decisions; infrastructure providers and LTP/RLTP teams need to be in the programme early.
11	Uncertainty should be managed, not used as a reason to wait.	Use assumptions registers, review triggers, and adaptable interim governance arrangements while final legislation, regulations and national direction settle.
12	The bottom-line message for managers.	Treat RSP as a whole-of-region organisational change programme: governance, secretariat, evidence, participation, workforce, funding, and implementation must be designed together.
13	Head Start does not pause current-boundary RSP formation.	The DIA guidance points to current Bill-introduction regions as the immediate RSP starting point; regions should proceed now but design for reconstitution and continuity.
14	Central government representation needs a collective-government model.	The Ministerial appointee is only one part of the CG interface; managers should design the officials group, CG secretariat input, agency workstreams and escalation route.
15	NZTA is central, but not the whole CG.	NZTA should be deeply involved in transport, RLTP, state highway, designation, investment, and business-case matters, but should not be assumed to speak for all central government interests unless explicitly mandated.
16	Regional Public Service Commissioners may help convene, but are not automatic appointees.	RPSCs can help align regional public-service input and relationships, but need clear mandate and portfolio-agency support if used in the RSP governance model.
17	Regional leadership needs a stronger early cadence.	A CE/senior-executive steering layer may need to meet frequently early on to keep process agreement, committee, secretariat, funding, and partner-interface decisions moving.

10. Bottom line for managers

Councils should proceed with RSP establishment as a regional operating-model design exercise, not simply as an early planning workstream. The practical test for readiness is whether the region can make and sustain shared decisions through a clear committee, serviced by a capable secretariat, supported by common evidence, legitimate participation arrangements, realistic resourcing, and explicit links to implementation. Existing spatial planning collaborations give many regions a head start, but the Planning Bill requires those arrangements to be widened, formalised, and made capable of carrying statutory weight.

“Working regionally” also means designing the interfaces around the committee: Head Start continuity, central-government representation, RPSC convening potential, iwi/Māori partnership and participation and voting-rights. These should be treated as core operating-model questions, not later refinements.

Appendix: Practical checklist for council managers

Checklist area	Question for managers
Regional mandate	Has the CE Forum/Mayoral Forum or equivalent mandated establishment work and named a sponsor or lead?
Existing collaboration inventory	Have we mapped existing growth, transport, CDEM, infrastructure and spatial planning forums and decided what to reuse?
Process agreement	Does the draft agreement cover roles, scope, geographic focus, adjacent regions, iwi consultation, infrastructure engagement, public process, funding, evidence, escalation and change control?
Committee design	Is there a draft terms of reference covering membership, chairing, secretariat, decision rights, voting status, reporting, conflicts, and Ministerial interface?
Secretariat model	Do we know who hosts, funds, and staffs the secretariat, and what authority it has to commission work and maintain records?
Evidence/data readiness	Have existing FDS, growth strategy, RMA, infrastructure, hazards, environmental, iwi/Māori, and coastal datasets been assessed against Schedule 2 matters?
Capability and workload	Have councils identified scarce skills, small-council participation risks, BAU trade-offs and secondment/shared-service options?
Partner participation	Are iwi/Māori, CG agencies, infrastructure providers, adjacent regions, and major sector/community actors built into the programme architecture?
Implementation link	Has the region mapped how the RSP will connect to LTPs, infrastructure strategies, RLTPs, land-use plans and natural environment plans?
Uncertainty management	Is there an assumptions register and review trigger process for Bill changes, regulations, national direction, digital settings, funding, and Head Start change?
Current-boundary RSP continuity	Have we stated that current regional boundaries are the establishment baseline unless legislation provides otherwise?
Head Start scenario testing	Have we tested the operating model against full-region UA, subregional UA, cross-boundary UA, and multiple-UAs-in-one-region scenarios?
Collective government model	Have we specified how the CG position will be collected, authorised, communicated, and escalated behind any Ministerial appointee?
NZTA interface	Have we separated NZTA’s transport, investment, and designating-authority role from any possible whole-of-government representative role?

Checklist area	Question for managers
Regional Public Service Commissioner role	Have we clarified whether the RPSC is a committee member, observer, officials-group chair, convenor, secretariat adviser, or escalation conduit?
LGA voting-rights change	Have we tested whether committee and iwi/Māori governance models rely on non-elected appointed members voting or counting for quorum?

Source documents and official references

Primary source documents (prepared by SMConsulting)

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2. Discuss Paper - Enabling organisational readiness for regional spatial planning, 20 March 2026
3. Info Paper - Pl & NE 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 - Organisational Readiness for Regional Spatial Planning – Results of the RMRG Four-region April 2026 Stocktake Pilot, 4 May 2026

Official references

7. Ministry for the Environment, Better planning for a better New Zealand - <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/better-planning-for-a-better-new-zealand/>
8. New Zealand Legislation, Planning Bill 235-1 (latest version) - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
9. New Zealand Legislation, Natural Environment Bill 234-1 (latest version) - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/234/en/latest/>
10. Ministry for the Environment, Resource management reforms - <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/rma/rmreform/>
11. *Briefing Note 5. Regional Spatial Planning Committees - Briefing for Managers on Establishment and Operations*, updated 5 June 2026, used to align committee, Head Start, central-government, NZTA and RPSC treatment.
12. Department of Internal Affairs, *Guidance for Head Start outline proposals*, May 2026, as carried through updated Note No. 5.
13. Ministry for the Environment, *Supplementary Analysis Report: Replacing the Resource Management Act 1991 - Further Policy Decisions*, especially the statement that central government may be represented on spatial plan committees and must be part of spatial plan secretariats.
14. NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, Integrated land use and transport planning, and Public Service Commission Te Kawa Mataaho material on Regional Public Service Commissioners, as carried through Briefing Note No. 5.