

Regional spatial planning

Planning for growth. Protecting what matters

New Zealand's planning system is undergoing its most significant transformation in a generation. Under the Planning Act councils have until mid-2028 to publicly notify the first generation of draft regional spatial plans. For many councils, this work has started already.

Regional spatial plans are long-term strategic plans that will set coherent spatial direction for each region for the next 30 years. They must bring together planning for land use, infrastructure investment, environmental capacity, climate resilience, and the interests of mana whenua into a single, evidence-based framework.

Regional spatial plans will provide binding direction to land use plans and natural environment plans and to regional land transport plans and council long-term plans. The decisions embedded in the first regional spatial plans will shape communities, environments, and investment for decades to come.

Critically, the first regional spatial plans must be prepared before land use plans and natural environment plans exist; and before environmental limits are formally set through those plans. This creates real complexity: spatial commitments made now risk locking in growth patterns before key constraints are fully understood. Navigating that uncertainty will be one of the defining challenges of first-generation regional spatial plans.

How we can help

Tonkin + Taylor has been helping councils and communities navigate complex planning challenges across Aotearoa for decades.

Our multi-disciplinary team brings together planners, urban designers, landscape architects, ecologists, engineers, transport planners, geospatial analysts, and engagement specialists - the full range of expertise that regional spatial plans preparation demands.

Our experience preparing structure plans, masterplans, spatial frameworks, and our RMA policy and plan development work means our team brings deep experience in evidence gathering, spatial analysis, scenario testing, and multi-stakeholder processes that are at the heart of regional spatial plans preparation.

We know how to build a robust evidence base, design and manage a complex planning process, and communicate choices clearly to decision-makers, elected members, and communities.

We also understand what the new legislation requires. The Planning Act prescribes comprehensive mandatory content for RSPs, from sequenced urban development areas and infrastructure corridors to highly productive land, environmental limits, sites of significance to Māori, Treaty settlement statutory acknowledgements, and customary marine title areas. Our services span these requirements.



Our expertise

A key advantage of working with Tonkin + Taylor is the depth and breadth of specialist expertise available within a single integrated team.

As one of New Zealand's largest multi-disciplinary consultancies, we employ technical specialists across the country covering every discipline required for regional spatial plans preparation. This provides councils with direct access to a coordinated team of experts, rather than the complexity and inefficiencies of managing multiple consultants across separate workstreams.

Our in-house specialists span urban and strategic planning; urban design and place-based strategy; landscape architecture and visual assessment; ecology, biodiversity, and freshwater science; geotechnical and natural hazard assessment; climate resilience and coastal adaptation; infrastructure, three waters, and energy; transport; geospatial data and GIS; and community and stakeholder engagement.

Many are nationally recognised leaders in their fields, regularly acting as expert witnesses at resource consent and plan change hearings, peer reviewers on major projects, and contributors to national guidance and technical standards.

This depth of expertise particularly matters for regional spatial plan preparation. A regional spatial plan is not simply a collection of technical assessments - it is an integrated spatial strategy that must reconcile future growth, environmental capacity, infrastructure investment, natural hazards and climate resilience, and Te Tiriti obligations into decisions.

Our specialists bring established cross-disciplinary relationships from the outset and a shared approach to translating complex evidence into spatial outcomes; building a stronger, more defensible evidence base for the hearings panel process.



Our services

Securing your interests

We offer end-to-end support for RSP preparation; from early scoping and governance design through to independent hearings panel process support and plan adoption.

Evidence and spatial analysis

- Geospatial data management, integration, and gap identification
- Growth and development capacity analysis
- Infrastructure capacity, constraints, and investment planning
- Transport and connectivity analysis
- Highly productive land and rural land use assessment
- Environmental limits and biophysical constraints assessment
- Natural hazards and climate risk assessment
- Ecological and biodiversity assessment

Strategy, planning, and process

- Strategic spatial planning and scenario development
- Sequenced growth and land use strategy
- Spatial plan committee process design and governance support
- Plan-making and policy development

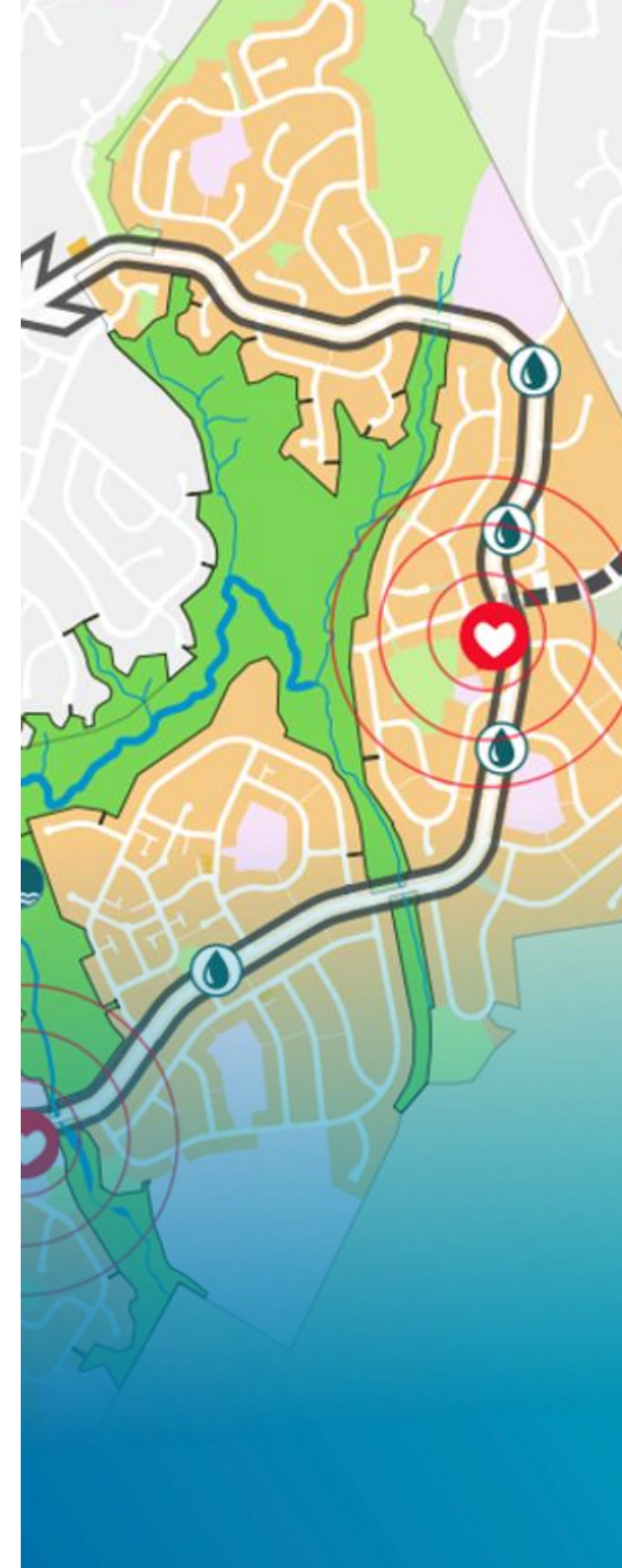
- Linkage to Land Use Plans, Natural Environment Plans, regional land transport plans, and long-term plans
- Expert evidence and independent hearings panel process support
- Plan monitoring and review frameworks

Technical specialisms

- Resilience and climate adaptation planning
- Landscape, urban, and visual analysis and planning
- Energy and utilities planning
- Separation of incompatible activities assessment
- Sites of significance to Māori, Treaty settlement statutory acknowledgements, and customary marine title
- Environmental and cultural heritage assessment

Engagement and partnership

- Participatory planning and design facilitation
- Cultural advisory and mana whenua partnering
- Iwi participation and Treaty obligations
- Community and stakeholder engagement
- Visual communication, mapping, and spatial storytelling
- Workshops and collaborative decision-making



Why choose us?

Regional spatial plans will be among the most consequential planning decisions made in Aotearoa this decade. With tight legislative timeframes and significant technical complexity, councils need to move quickly and with confidence.

Tonkin + Taylor is ready to help your council navigate the process - from the first scoping conversation through to a publicly notified draft regional spatial plans, and beyond.



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