

Item 3: Wānaka Airport Future Review Community Engagement

SESSION TYPE: Briefing

PURPOSE/DESIRED OUTCOME:

Workshop presented by the independent consultant team appointed to engage with the community and wider stakeholders to understand and develop scenarios for the potential future operation and purpose of Wānaka airport.

An independent consulting team will present a summary of community engagement findings on potential development scenarios, along with recommendations for the future planning and management of Wānaka airport.

DATE/TIME:

10 February 2026 at 11:40am

TIME BREAKDOWN:

Presentation: 60 min

Questions/Discussion: 30 minutes

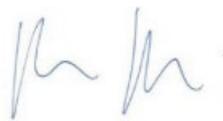
Prepared by:



Name: Paul Speedy

Title: Manager Strategic Projects
29 January 2026

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Meaghan Miller

Title: Corporate Services GM
29 January 2026

ATTACHMENTS:

A	EGIS Wānaka Future Airport Study Community Engagement Summary
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Wānaka Airport Future Study

Engagement Results and Conclusions_

WANAKA AIRPORT

IMAGINE
CREATE
ACHIEVE
a sustainable future

Purpose of the engagement

Quick Facts

- Wānaka Airport is owned by QLDC and operated by QAC.
- These works have included:
 - 2 Online surveys
 - In-person community workshops
 - User group workshops
 - + Multiple stakeholder group meetings
- There are no scheduled flights from the airport as Sounds Air ceased flights to Wānaka in September 2025.
- The airport currently supports over 200 local jobs.
- The airport is currently subsidised by QLDC.

This community engagement project aims to determine the local community, user groups, local business group and local stakeholders' preferred scenarios for the future of the Wānaka Airport.

This extends to providing credible, possible and reasonable options to consider to improve the financial performance of the asset and maximise the community benefit of the airport.

Further context for the works is that:

- QLDC has received formal notification from CAA that the airport must be managed under the authority of Part 139 Qualifying Aerodrome Operator Certificate by 1 July 2027
- Local stakeholder groups took QLDC to the High Court over the 99-year lease of Wānaka Airport to QAC

These works will provide independent recommendations on the future of Wānaka Airport and its management. We will provide advice to enable the community's vision of the future of the airport, land use considerations for the site and financial viability of the council asset.

Community Engagement Phases 1 and 2



Online Survey #2
 29 August to 19 September
In-person workshop #2
 29 and 30 August
Online Survey #1
 16 June to 15 July
In-person workshop #1
 27 and 28 June

PHASE 2

1,133

Online Survey Responses

4,775

Project Page Visits

3 weeks

of Online Survey Uptime

2 days

of In-person Wānanga Community Drop-in Sessions

90-100

Participants In Person

3

Email Submissions

PHASE 1

261

Online Survey Responses

2,230

Project Page Visits

4 weeks

of Online Survey Uptime

2 days

of In-person Wānanga Community Drop-in Sessions

90-100

Participants In Person

5

Email Submissions



Base Scenario **Results**



01

Overview of results

The most supported Scenario was Scenario 3: Wānaka Airport to be a General Aviation Airport with Domestic routes to Christchurch and/or Wellington.

The community enthusiastically endorses using the airport for more than just aviation activities. Landside development for the benefit of the community and local businesses is a clear direction that the community and airport stakeholders want the airport to go in. All Complementary Options had a level of positive support, showing that the community has a general positive view of using the site for broader benefits.

Scenario 3 preference was mostly preferred as it limits the risks around potential overtourism, population growth, overburdening of local utilities and services, environmental impact, airspace impact, and noise concerns. These were negatives that were associated with additional connections to other New Zealand cities.

There were many responses which wanted connections to Christchurch, especially for medical services. For this to be realised the airport will need to go into discussions with airlines and the central government to understand what could enable the revival of this route.

Future aircraft and innovation were popular themes, preparing the airport for electric aircraft and promoting their development in Wānaka were popular with the community.

Most to Least Supported Scenarios

3

2

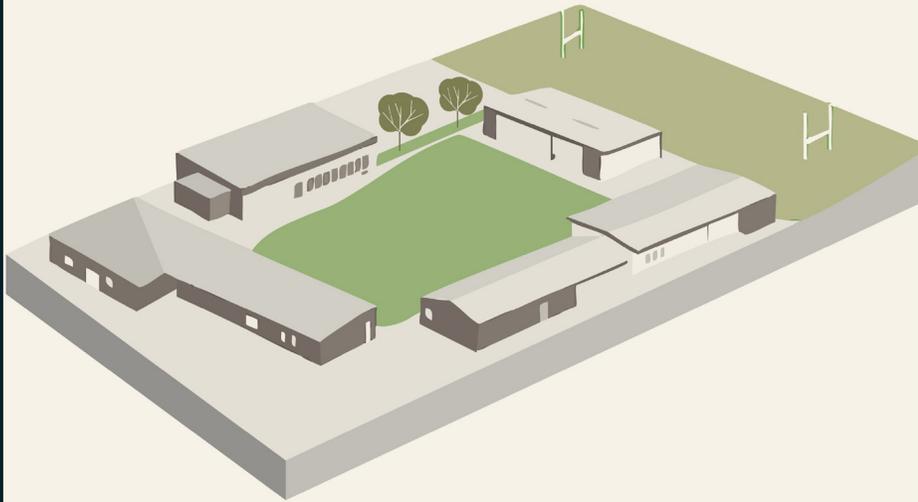
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1

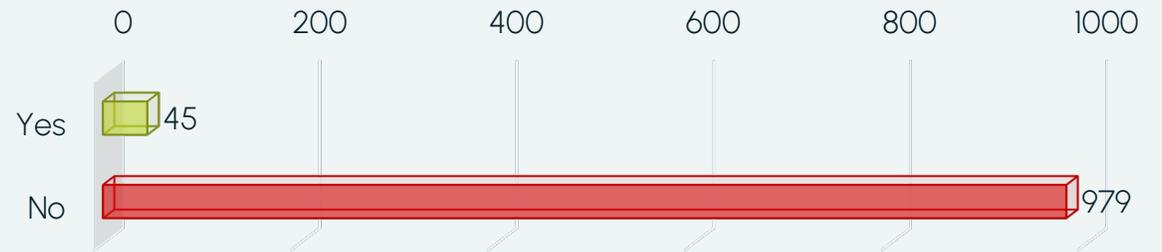
Number of "Preferred" option responses in person:

0

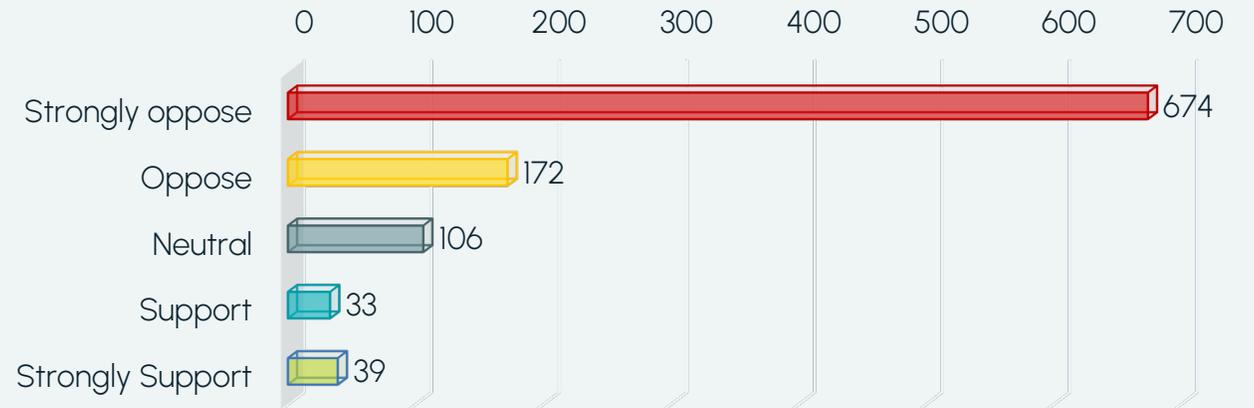


Scenario 1: Close Wānaka Airport

Do you support closing Wānaka Airport?

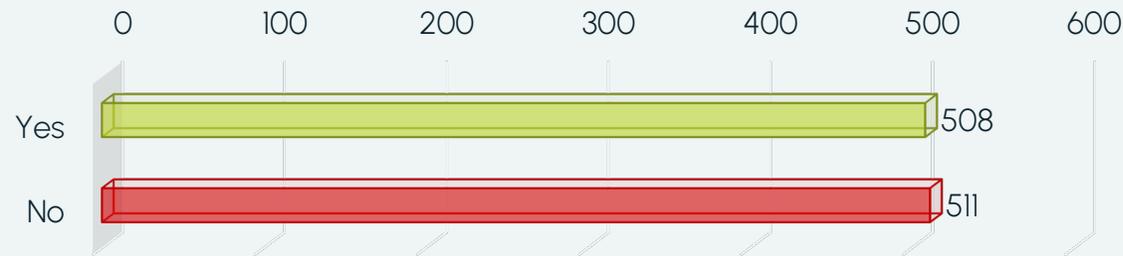


To what extent do you support or oppose this option?

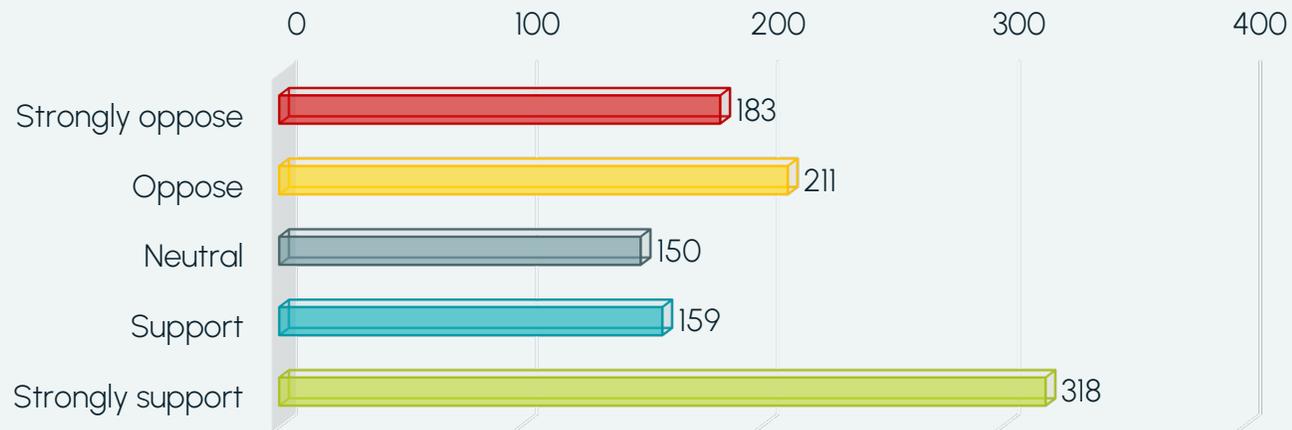


Scenario 2: Wānaka Airport to be a General Aviation Airport only

Do you support keeping Wānaka Airport as a general aviation airport only, with no scheduled services to other airports?

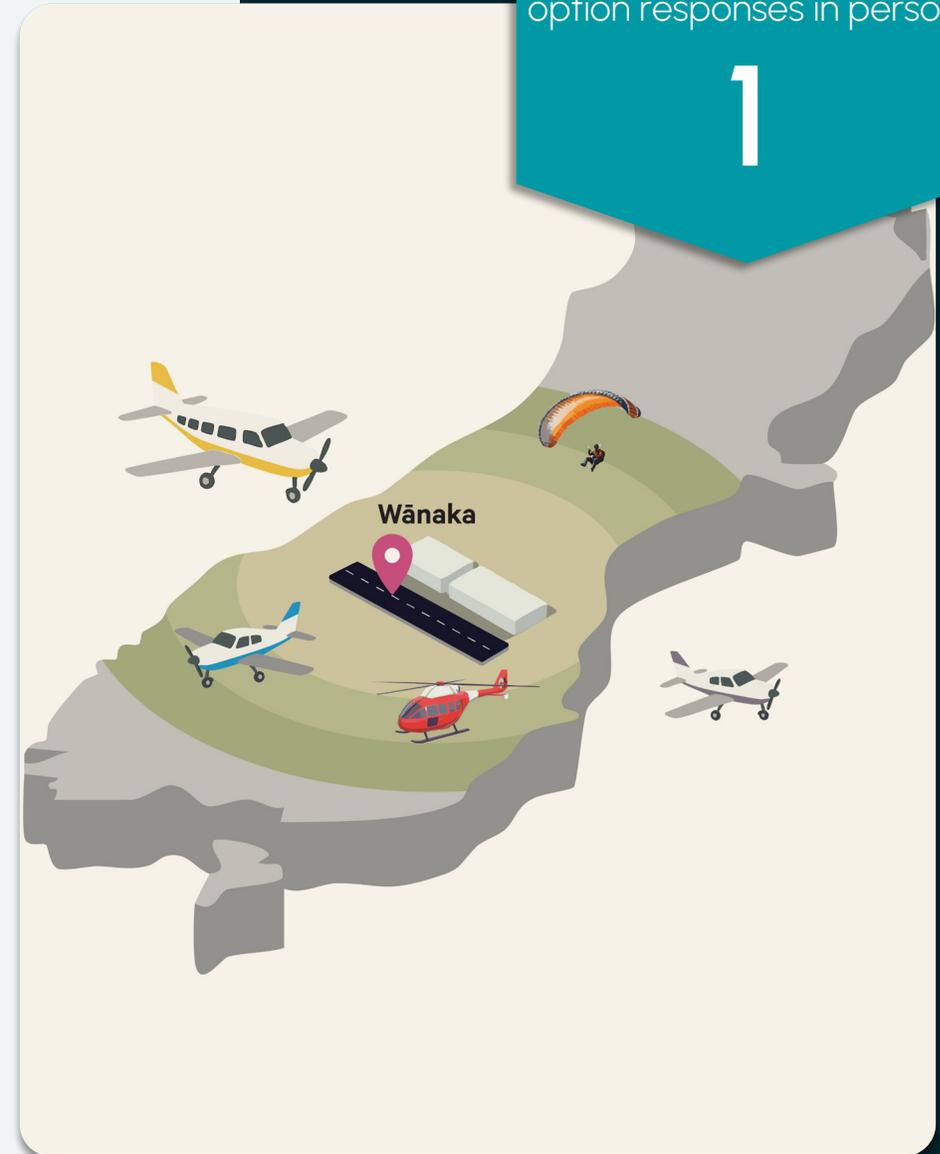


To what extent do you support or oppose this option?



Number of "Preferred" option responses in person:

1



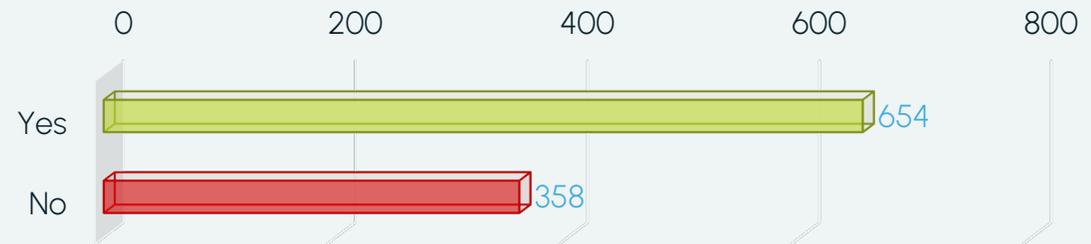
Number of "Preferred" option responses in person:

51 (highest)

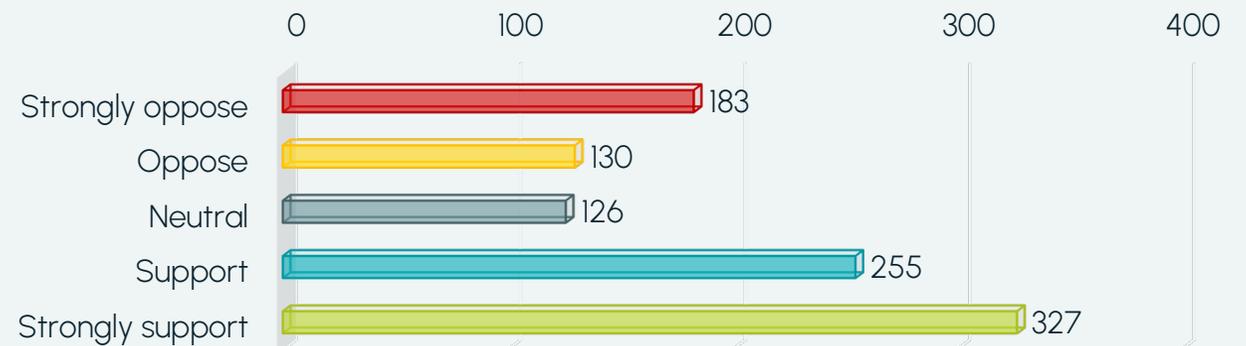


Scenario 3: Wānaka Airport to be a General Aviation Airport with Domestic routes to Christchurch and/or Wellington

Do you support planning to upgrade Wānaka Airport to include scheduled turboprop flights to Christchurch and/or Wellington, while keeping General Aviation as it is?

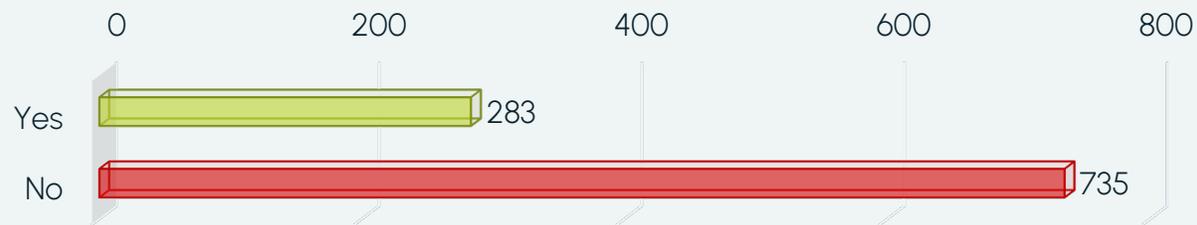


To what extent do you support or oppose this option?

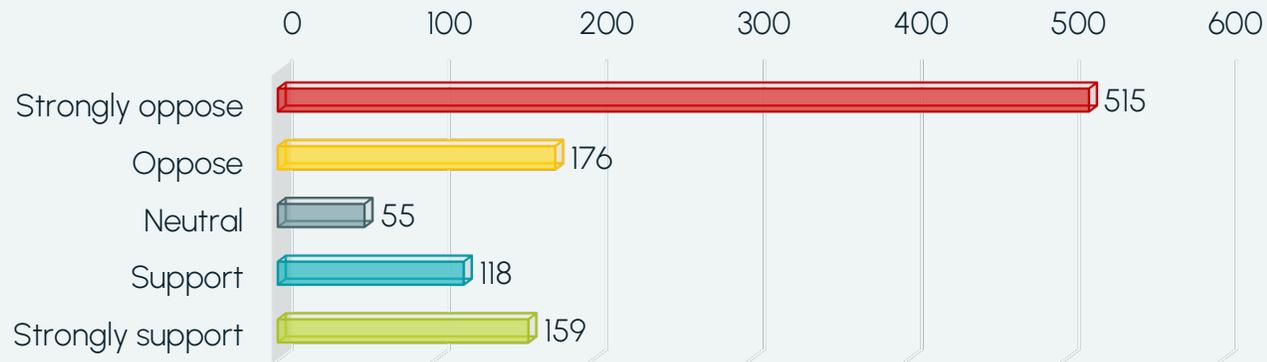


Scenario 4: Wānaka Airport to be a General Aviation Airport with Domestic routes including direct to Auckland

Do you support planning to upgrade Wānaka Airport to include scheduled flights as far as Auckland, which would require larger turboprop aircraft or jets carrying between 30–115 passengers, requiring the current runway to be extended and/or realigned and airport to be upgraded?

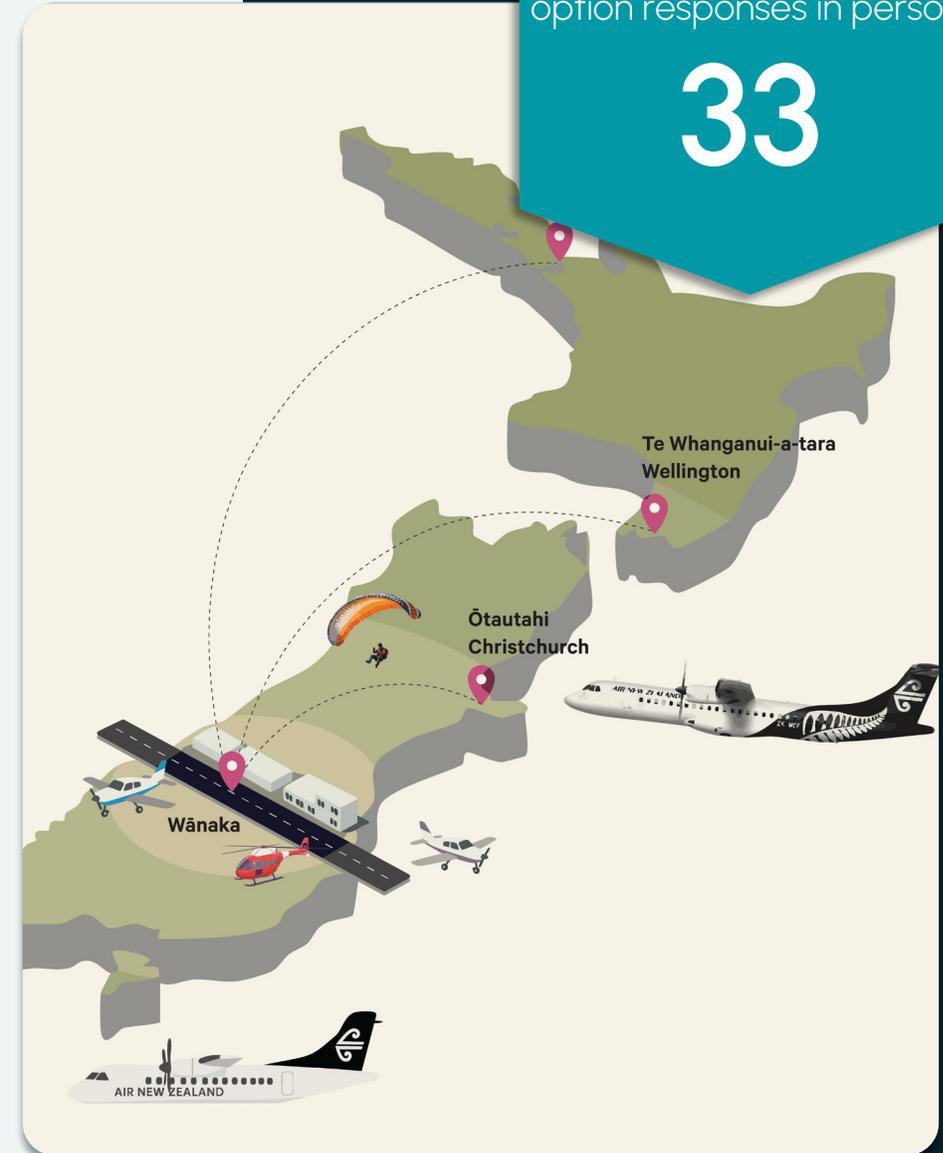


To what extent do you support or oppose this option?



Number of "Preferred" option responses in person:

33



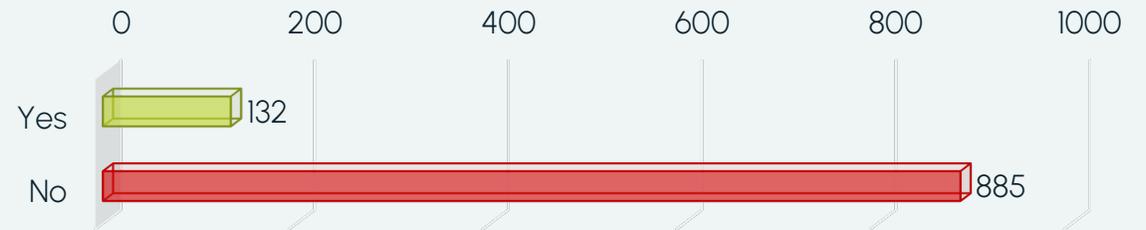
Number of "Preferred" option responses in person:

1

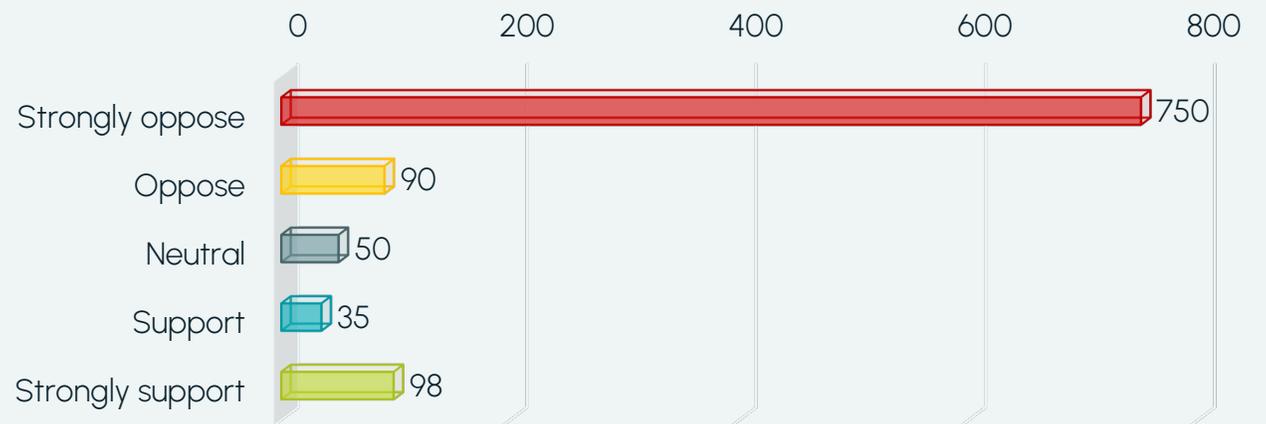


Scenario 5: Wānaka Airport to be a primarily domestic and international airport focused

Do you support planning for Wānaka Airport to become an international airport with connections to New Zealand cities, Australia or the Pacific?



To what extent do you support or oppose this option?





Complementary
Options

02

Complementary option 1: Wānaka Airport as a more prominent Community Asset

Quick Facts

72% of respondents stated that they do not use the airport

Wānaka Airport currently supports many aviation businesses, including scenic flights, flight training, parachuting, and the Warbirds Over Wānaka event. These activities provide local jobs and tourism benefits.

This option is aimed at evaluating the community's openness to extending the range of services at the airport to provide broader services, make better use of vacant airport land, and make the airport more relevant to more residents.

The Phase 2 Community Engagement asked the respondents to indicate their support or opposition to these main items:

- Extending the airport's services to provide wider benefits for the local community
- Wānaka airport as an emergency and medical response hub
- Events and recreation at Wānaka Airport
- Additional local community involvement in the oversight of the airport

Wānaka Airport is well located to serve as civil defence and emergency response hub for the Upper Clutha region. Emergency Management was considered a top 3 outcome for prioritisation from in-person and online engagement in Phase 1 of the Community Engagement.

Airports become critical infrastructure for emergency services in the case of wide-scale disasters, 86% of responses supported developing the airport to address civil defence and emergency services capabilities, and development of hangars, back-up power supplies and other enabling infrastructure.

One of the main uses for the previous Sounds Air connection was medical travel. This need for some residents to travel to Christchurch or further for medical treatment will now require people to travel via Queenstown. Options were presented to the community to aim to develop Wānaka to have medical facilities and a permanent flying doctor service or medical transfer service. These were strongly supported by the community with 78% support.

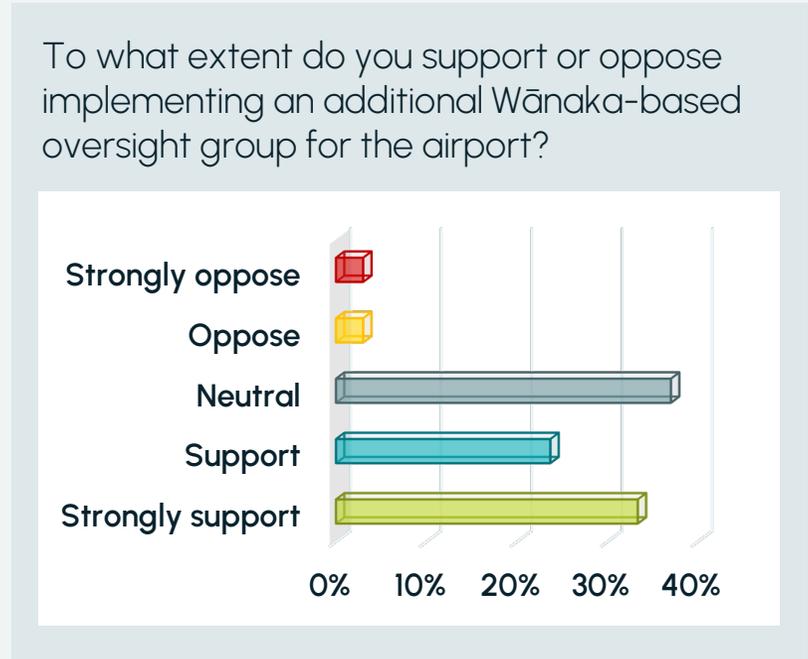
Other well-supported options were to encourage using the airport to host more events.

Management at Wānaka Airport

When asked about management at the airport, the idea of local oversight was popular. We interpreted some of this to be a result of low transparency with the current operating model and financial performance of the community asset. A lack of clarity on future airport development has created a vacuum of information and resulted in mistrust around the airport’s ambitions.

14

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Opinion
Are you satisfied with the local representations in management at Wānaka Airport?	15%	43%	30%	12%
Would you want an additional Wānaka-based oversight for the airport?	61%	6%	22%	11%



Complementary option 2: Promote aero-related businesses - aviation excellence and innovation

Questions were aimed at whether the community wanted the airport to actively attract additional users and support the current users' growth, which includes investment into additional enabling infrastructure.

Develop local aviation businesses and promote industry and research

This Complementary Option is to measure support for initiatives which enable growth of current and future users through development of the site and development of hangars and utilities at the airport. Wānaka has an opportunity to be a centre of excellence for aviation ranging from aircraft development, training, unpowered flight, and maintenance.

Investment to enable the success of local aviation businesses was strongly supported across the engagement. Including infrastructure investment (hangars, services).

Industry, shows and research

Community-led environmental initiatives and conservation actions were among the strongest themes raised during Phase 1 engagement. Wānaka with its open airspace, established GA industry, world class scenery and established international airshow are in a good place to attract future aircraft innovation, testing and demonstrating. This was well supported.

Some of the most supported options are to enable more research and innovation, similar to the NASA balloon launches. There is also support for developing an airshow for future aircraft.

Community Comments on what services they want to see at the airport:

The land could well be used for festivals, concerts and show events.

Environmentally sustainable options.

The airport is an airport. A solar farm with opportunities to cheapen local power would be more than enough community service.

Please no solar farm - ruin the look of our beautiful spot.

Complementary option 3: Promote non-aviation services/businesses at Wānaka Airport

General industrial and non-aviation uses

Airports often have industrial parks due to the distance from town centres and both generally generating noise. The community was very consistent with support for allowing airport land to be used for general industrial or commercial use. Allowing these services to have a space outside of town but in close proximity will allow industry to grow without impact to the town centre. Changes in zoning to allow for this enables a separation between industrial uses and residential or low noise, low space commercial uses.

There was strong support for the airport using some of its land for general industrial or commercial use, such as warehouses, business parks, car dealerships, or distribution centres.

Community services, solar generation and community batteries

Many airports are now running solar farms and installing community batteries. This can support the local energy network with resilience and supply of green energy and can help manage future energy rates. Solar farms often work with airports as they are low profile and do not impact airport operations, making good use of otherwise unusable land. The community was supportive of a solar farm and community battery on site.

Complementary option 4: A financially self- sufficient Wānaka Airport

This complementary option gauges what financial motive the operational model of the community thinks that the airport should have, and where the community feels is most appropriate to fund the operations from.

Many services are not expected to return profits to the Council. Understanding that the benefit to the community for any service needs to be in relation with the costs associated with the service.

Wānaka Airport currently runs at a loss, which is subsidised by QLDC ratepayers. This is common for airports of a similar size in New Zealand and internationally. The main sources of revenue for the airport are rent from tenants and landing fees from GA users.

The community overwhelmingly wanted the airport to aim to fully cover its own costs in the future. This, coupled with the strong support for subsidising the airport when needed, indicates that the community places a high value on its asset, and that they want the asset to continue to support the local businesses currently using it, but that they want the airport to fund itself when possible.

This provides a strong basis for supporting the development of additional revenue streams through other diversified activities, in line with well-supported complementary options.

Conclusion

Through this engagement, we listened to Wānaka locals and user groups. There was a strong response from the community, which found that **the most supported Scenario was Scenario 3: Wānaka Airport to be a General Aviation Airport with Domestic routes to Christchurch and/or Wellington.**

The community was also supportive of:

- Upgrading Wānaka Airport to enable civil defence and emergency services
- Wānaka Airport to widen its services to include energy generation, energy storage, additional events and shows
- Additional investment to enable a centre of aviation excellence. This includes additional utilities connections, hangars and commercial space
- Attract innovation through attracting future aircraft testing and demonstration

The community wants proactive management of the airport to enable their future vision for the future of Wānaka and Wānaka Airport. The community is supportive of expanding the scope of the airport to better address its own financial performance, provide additional services to the community and continue to support the current events and users.

Recommendations

Egis recommends that QLDC proceeds with a masterplan using strong community participation and results from this engagement as a basis to realise Scenario 3.

Egis is confident that the current management structure could successfully deliver our recommendations. It is important that QAC is aligned with the community-supported scenario and masterplan. QLDC and QAC will need to work closely with the community to build trust as they develop a masterplan in line with Scenario 3 and the supported Complementary Options. With the current void in information and clear plans for the future of the airport, some of the community have made assumptions about what future plans there are for the airport. A master plan would address this issue.

Potential benefits QAC can bring to Wānaka is the wide connections with airlines, which could help bring airlines back to Wānaka. It could also help to attract other innovative aviation opportunities. It has strong links to other aviation experts who can be called upon to assist with Wānaka Airport. QAC also has experience with developing supplementary revenue streams for other airports.

We recommend more transparency on the airport's financial performance and future ambitions to be documented in the masterplan. Some external specialist support will need to be brought in to achieve the community goals at the airport, such as land development, energy generation, civil defence, medical connections and central government funding.

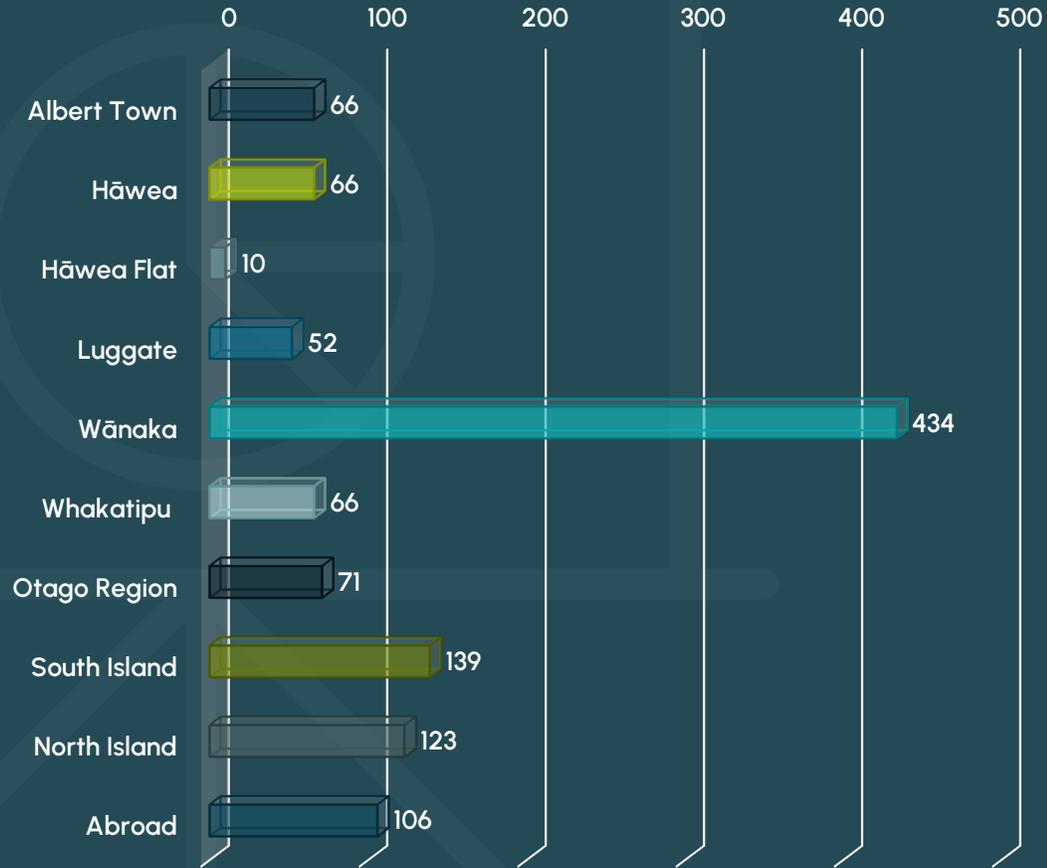
Appendix



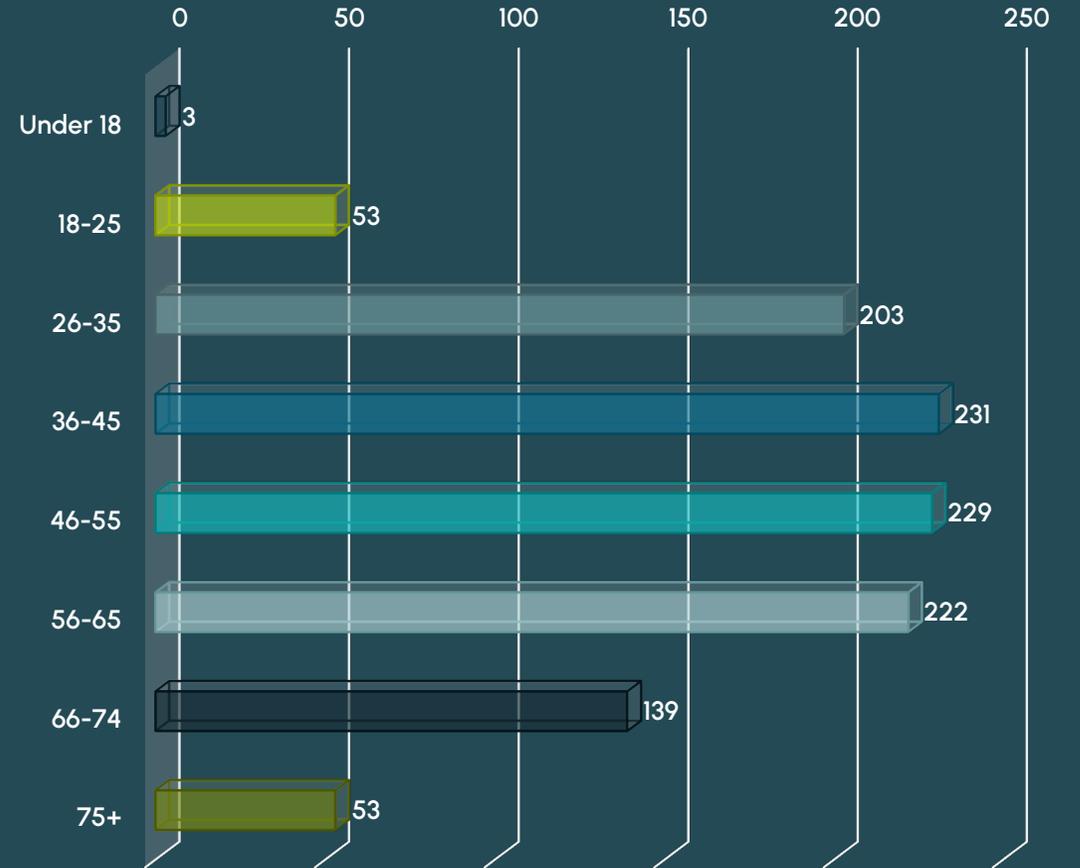
A

Snapshot of demographic participation

Where do you live...

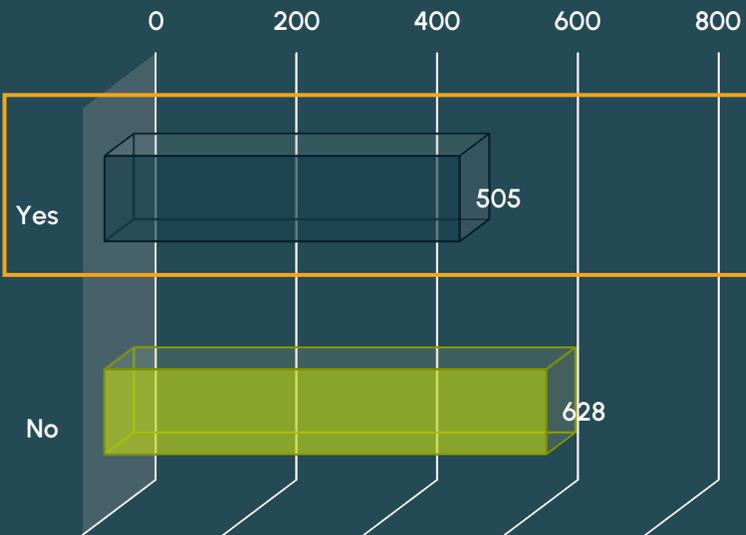


Your age

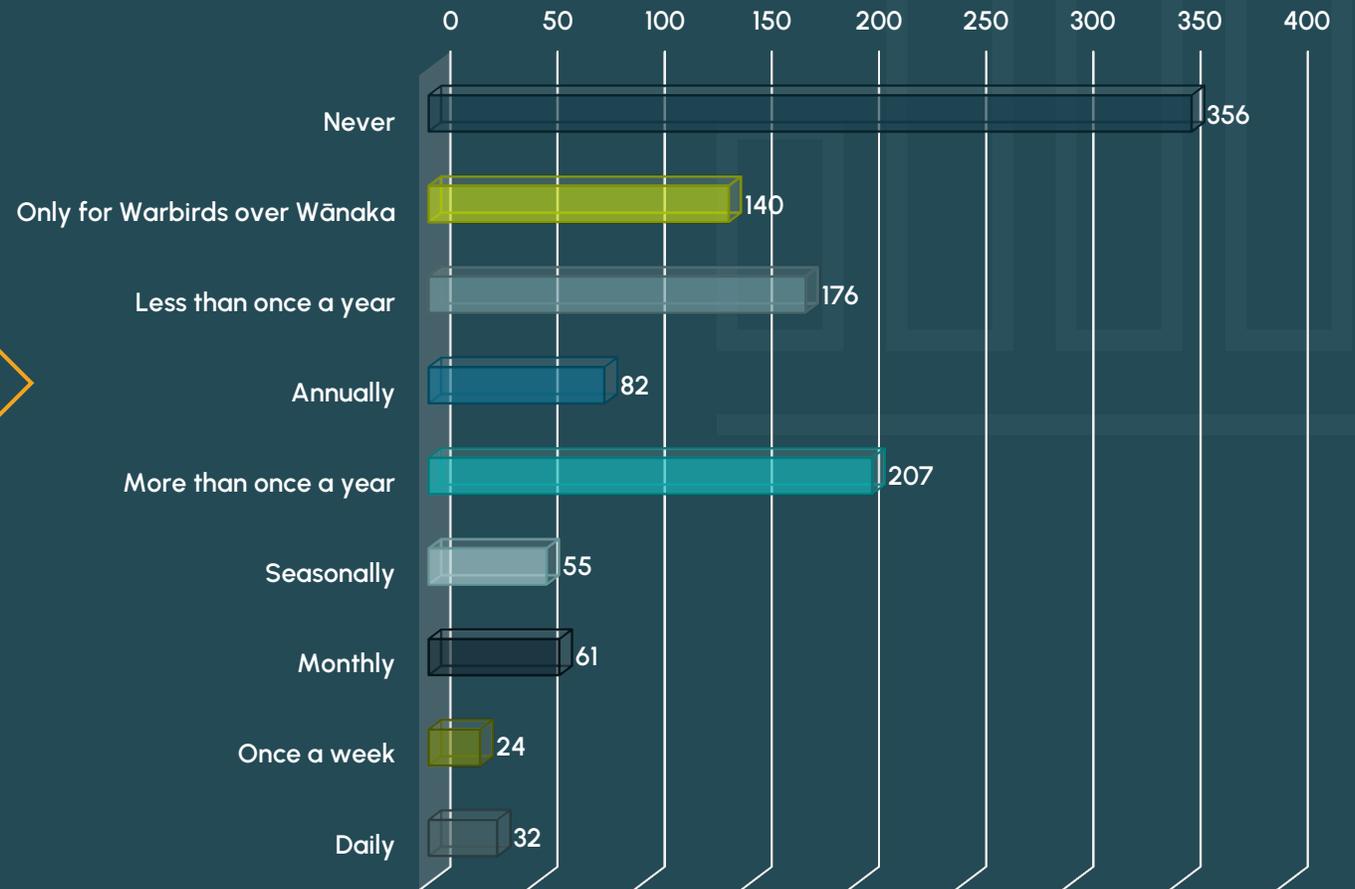


Do you use the airport?

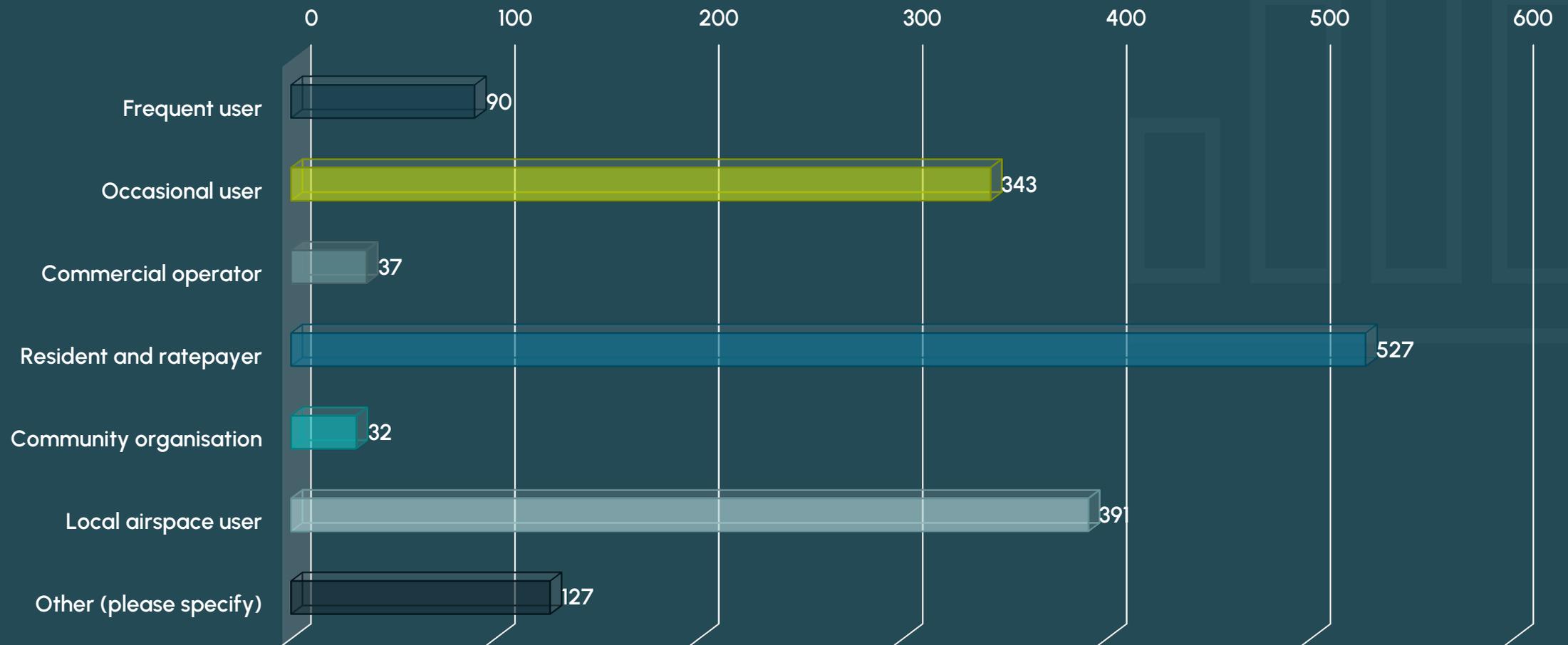
Do you currently use Wānaka Airport for any reason?



How often do you use Wānaka Airport for any reason?



What is your interest in Wānaka Airport? (Please tick that all apply)

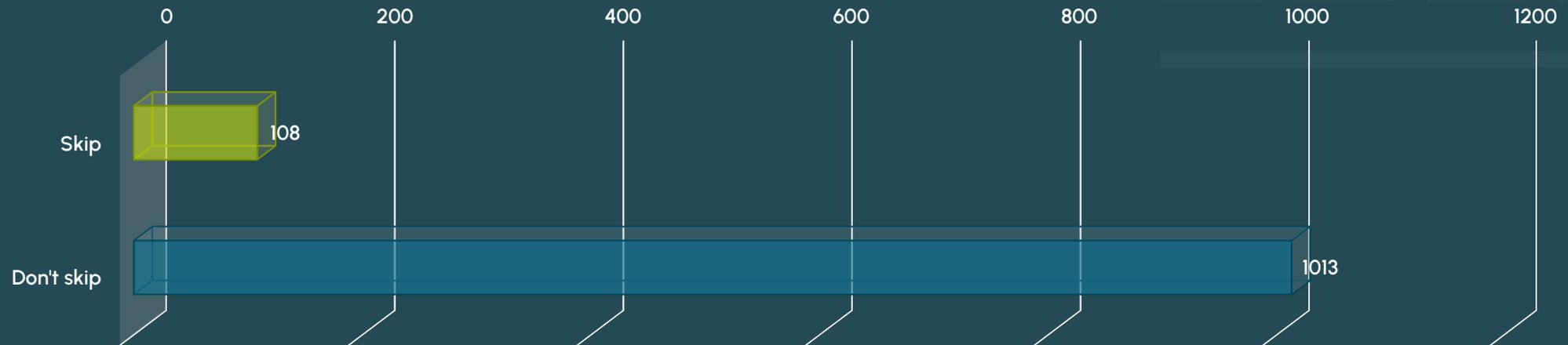


Participation

The vast majority of participants wanted to put input into the base scenarios. There was a lower participation rate on the Complementary Options of 17-27% of the total respondents.

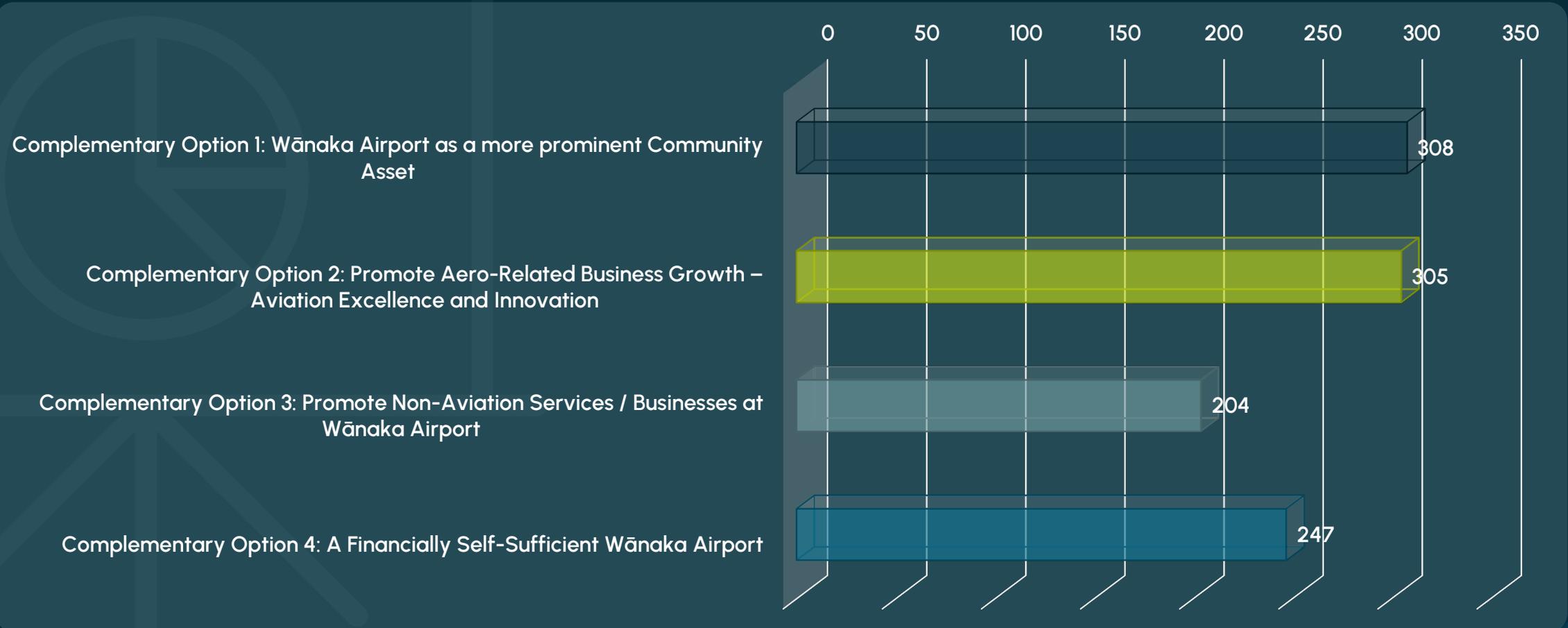
At QLDC request an option was added to skip the survey itself and instead submit a free text response. Free text results were interpreted and their responses matched to the relevant scenarios.

If you wish to skip the full survey and instead provide general feedback, please select the below.



Complementary options

Which complementary options do you wish to speak to? (Please select all that apply):



Complementary option 1: Wānaka Airport as a more prominent Community Asset

There was strong support for civil defence and emergency service enabling events. Support for additional events and many ideas on what could work were also presented. Sporting facilities at the airport had low but positive support.

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Opinion
Do you support Wānaka Airport being developed to serve as an emergency response hub for the Upper Clutha?	86%	4%	7%	3%
Do you support developing Wānaka Airport to include additional emergency infrastructure (e.g. multi-use hangars, back-up power supplies) to strengthen community resilience?	86%	3%	8%	3%
Do you support developing Wānaka Airport to host medical facilities and a permanent flying doctor service?	78%	10%	8%	4%
Do you support Wānaka Airport being used to host additional events?	70%	14%	10%	7%
Do you support utilising the Wānaka Airport landholding to create sporting or recreational facilities?	56%	24%	12%	8%

Complementary option 2: Promote aero-related businesses - aviation excellence and innovation

Develop local aviation businesses and promote industry and research

Question	Strongly support	Support	Neutral	Oppose	Strongly oppose
How important do you think the success of local aviation businesses is to Wānaka?	49%	42%	8%	0%	1%
Do you support investment in hangars and buildings to help local businesses grow?	34%	48%	16%	2%	1%
Do you support investment in utilities (internet, water, sewerage) to enable business growth?	33%	52%	13%	1%	1%
How supportive are you of investment into training facilities to enable flight training businesses to grow at the airport?	39%	44%	13%	3%	1%
How supportive are you of investment into accommodation facilities to enable flight training businesses to grow at the airport?	23%	36%	26%	11%	4%

Questions were aimed at whether the community wanted the airport to actively attract additional users and support the current users' growth, which includes investment into additional enabling infrastructure.

Complementary option 2: Promote aero-related businesses - aviation excellence and innovation

Industry, shows and research

Community-led environmental initiatives and conservation actions were among the strongest themes raised during Phase 1 engagement. We measured the community support for the airport choosing to be a proactive participant in the energy transition by attracting manufacturers and innovators to test and prove new aircraft in Wānaka.

As the industry aims to decarbonise, places where manufacturing, testing and demonstration of new aircraft can occur are being sought out. Wānaka, with its open airspace, established GA industry, world-class scenery and established international airshow are in a good place to attract these businesses.

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Opinion
Would you support Wānaka Airport actively attracting aircraft manufacturers to test and prove new small innovative aircraft here?	70%	9%	6%	14%
Would you support Wānaka Airport hosting a future aircraft airshow similar to Warbirds?	80%	5%	9%	6%
Do you support the airport seeking more research users (like NASA) for balloon launches or similar activities?	84%	8%	3%	5%

Warbirds over Wānaka was one of the main drawcards to Wānaka Airport, both for locals and tourists. This event is popular and there could be opportunities to use the site for more events

Complementary option 3: Promote non-aviation services/businesses at Wānaka Airport

Community services, solar generation and community batteries

Many airports are now running solar farms and installing community batteries. This can support the local energy network with resilience and supply of green energy and can help manage future energy rates. In addition, future aircraft are likely to require more electricity, so such investment would help prepare the airport for future needs. Solar farms often work with airports as they are low profile and do not impact airport operations, making good use of otherwise unusable land.

Community services which are normally restricted near town centres can also work well with the airport, the current Project Pure is a good example of using airport land with limited uses to meet community service demands.

Question	Strongly support	Support	Neutral	Oppose	Strongly oppose
Do you support developing a solar farm at Wānaka Airport?	35%	32%	22%	5%	6%
Do you support installing a community battery at Wānaka Airport?	32%	32%	26%	7%	4%
Do you support using the land at the airport to provide community services?	25%	34%	31%	7%	3%

Community Comments on what services they want to see at the airport:

The land could well be used for festivals, concerts and show events.

Environmentally sustainable options.

Please no solar farm - ruin the look of our beautiful spot.

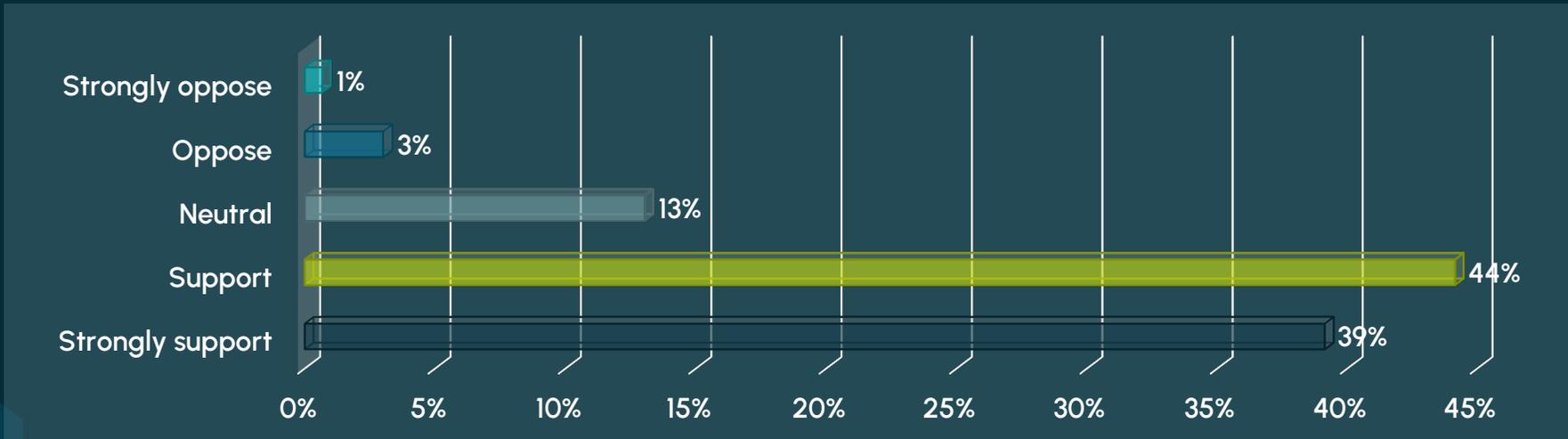
The airport is an airport. A solar farm with opportunities to cheapen local power would be more than enough community service.

Complementary option 3: Promote non-aviation services/businesses at Wānaka Airport

General industrial and non-aviation uses

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How supportive are you of the airport using some of its land for general industrial or commercial use, such as warehouses, business parks, car dealerships, or distribution centres?



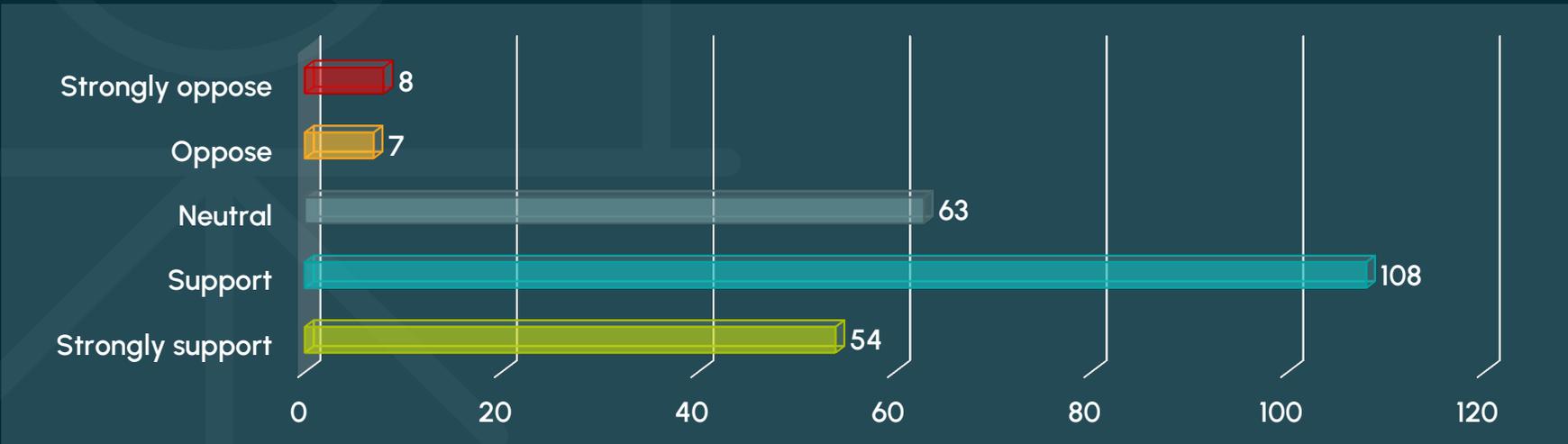
Community Comments on what services they want to see at the airport:

- Compatible ones that don't negatively impact its core function - aviation.
- Lower rent options for local SMEs.
- Emergency resource management
- Civil defence purposes.
- Museum or interactive attractions that require space. Eg kart track.

Complementary option 4: A financially self-sufficient Wānaka Airport

Wānaka Airport currently runs at a loss, which is subsidised by QLDC ratepayers. This is common for airports of a similar size in New Zealand and internationally. Since Sounds Air has announced it will no longer operate from Wānaka beyond 28th September 2025, there are no longer any scheduled services to Wānaka Airport. The main sources of revenue for the airport are rent from tenants and landing fees from GA users. The community was asked to indicate the extent to which they want the airport to cover its own day-to-day costs in general.

How important is it to you that Wānaka Airport covers its own operational costs (day-to-day running)?



This complementary option gauges what financial motive the operational model of the community thinks that the airport should have, and where the community feels is most appropriate to fund the operations from.

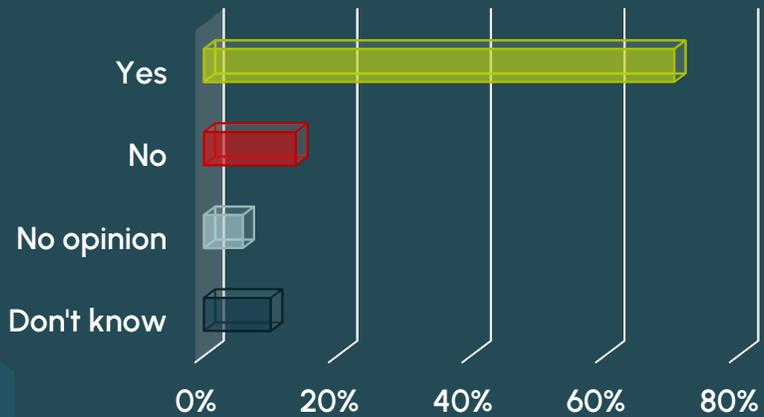
Many services are not expected to return profits to the Council.

Understanding that the benefit to the community for any service needs to be in relation to the costs associated with the service.

Complementary Option 4: A financially self-sufficient Wānaka Airport

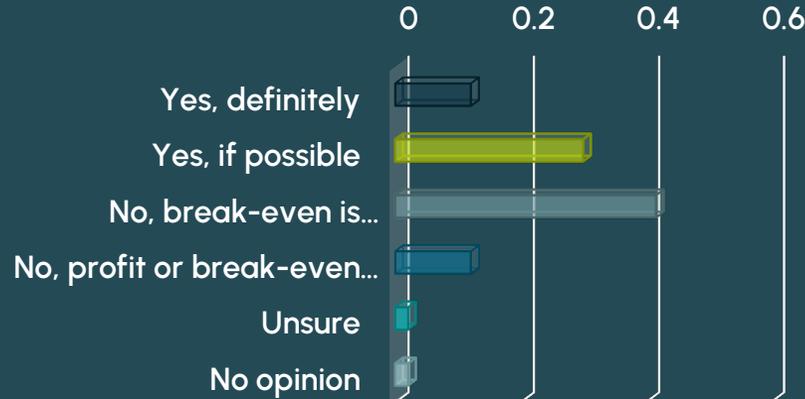
Financial motive for the airport

The community overwhelmingly wanted the airport to aim to fully cover its own costs in the future. This coupled with the strong support for subsidising the airport when needed indicates that the community places a high value on its asset, and that they want the asset to continue to support the local businesses currently using it, but that they want the airport to fund itself when possible.



Source of funding

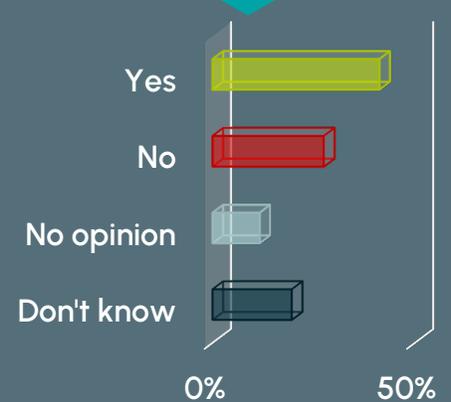
The community overall wanted the airport to consider its financial performance, were generally supportive of subsidising the airport and wanted the airport to aim for break even on costs, or a surplus if possible. This indicates that the community sees the airport as a community asset, which should be managed with considerations on the cost to the community.



When asked:

Do you support Wānaka Airport continuing to be subsidised by QLDC ratepayers at its current level?

Respondents were not told how much the airport is subsidised. No opinion and Don't know accounted for 1/3 responses.





Contact

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