

## Full Council

19 March 2026

### Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [4]

**Department: Corporate Services**

**Title | Taitara: Wānaka Airport Future Review – Independent Consultant Report (Egis) and Preferred Scenario**

#### Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to present the findings and recommendations of the independent Wānaka Airport Future Review undertaken by Egis. The report also seeks Council approval of a preferred scenario and to direct officers to return with options for implementing a new Wānaka Airport Master Plan.

#### Executive Summary | Whakarāpopototaka Matua

In 2024, QLDC commissioned an independent, expert review of Wānaka Airport to understand the community's vision for its future, test feasible aviation scenarios, and provide Council with evidence-based recommendations. This work was prompted by significant community interest in the airport's long-term direction, mandatory Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Part 139 certification requirements, and the need for a new Master Plan (last published 2008).

Egis undertook a comprehensive programme including technical assessments, economic analysis, and a two-phase community engagement process involving over 1,100 survey responses, in person workshops, and targeted stakeholder engagement. The clear outcome of this work is a community preference for Scenario 3: a general aviation airport supported by limited scheduled turboprop services using small aircraft (≤30 seats) to Christchurch and potentially Wellington or other regional connectivity.

Scenario 3 requires no immediate airside capital investment beyond current Part 139 work, avoids the environmental, amenity and airspace impacts associated with larger aircraft, and provides the best alignment with community values and local needs. Egis recommends Scenario 3 as the basis for future planning, and now Council adoption of this scenario is sought, to offer community and airport user certainty and to give officers direction to prepare implementation options for the Master Plan.

#### Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

1. **Note** the Wānaka Airport Future Review – Community engagement results and recommendations prepared independently by Egis (**Attachment A**);

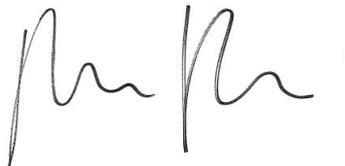
2. **Adopt** Scenario 3 as the preferred future operating scenario for Wānaka Airport, noting that Scenario 3 maintains general aviation activity and allows limited scheduled turboprop services ( $\leq 30$  seats); and
3. **Direct** officers to report back with options for undertaking a new Wānaka Airport Master Plan to deliver Scenario 3 (Egis Report 2026).

**Prepared by:**



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24 February 2026

**Reviewed and Authorised by:**



**Name:** Meaghan Miller  
**Title:** General Manager Corporate Services  
25 March 2026

## Context | Horopaki

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1. Wānaka Airport is at a pivotal moment in its development. Regulatory, operational and community drivers have converged to require both immediate operational planning and a longer-term strategic direction. In 2023, the Civil Aviation Authority issued formal notification that the airport must achieve compliance as a Part 139 Qualifying Aerodrome by 1 July 2027, requiring mandatory safety, operational and management upgrades. The Queenstown Airport Corporation (QAC), under its management agreement with Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) has been progressing this operational compliance work.
2. In parallel, the cessation of Sounds Air services in 2025 left Wānaka with no scheduled air connectivity, intensifying community interest in the airport's future. The QLDC Long Term Plan 2024-34 committed to ensuring the wider community would directly shape airport decisions, given the airport's strategic role in connectivity, economic resilience, emergency response and the local aviation sector.
3. To support this, Council issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) in December 2024 for an independent future review. Egis was appointed to undertake a full scope assessment involving technical analysis, economic appraisal, regulatory evaluation, scenario development (1-5), stakeholder workshops and extensive community engagement.
4. Egis has identified Scenario 3 as the preferred future operating model for Wānaka Airport. This scenario retains the airport's general aviation focus while enabling limited scheduled turboprop services using aircraft with up to 30 seats. It aligns strongly with community preferences, has minimal impact on existing airspace, and requires no immediate airside capital investment beyond current Part 139 compliance work.
5. Community engagement indicated strong support for improvements in regional connectivity, emergency and medical response capability, aviation training and industry development, and opportunities for low-emissions aviation innovation. Conversely, the community expressed clear opposition to larger aircraft operations or growth that would compromise Wānaka's character or impact free-flight airspace users.

### ***Opportunities and Potential Outcomes for the Community***

6. Egis' two-phase engagement programme revealed a clear and consistent vision from the community for the future of the airport. The community strongly values the airport's role in supporting local employment, general aviation activity, emergency services, and modest levels of connectivity, while also expressing concern about increased development, increased tourism, environmental impacts, and potential changes to the region's unique open airspace. The independent review shows that much of what the community wants the airport to enable is achievable under Scenario 3.

7. The engagement highlighted the airport's potential to support essential connectivity, particularly for access to specialist medical services in Christchurch, which many residents previously relied upon before scheduled services ceased. Restoring short turboprop links was repeatedly described to improve wellbeing and reduce travel burdens, especially for families and older residents. At the same time, respondents were clear that such services must remain small scale, avoiding larger aircraft or infrastructure upgrades that may lead to increased tourism pressure or airspace changes. Scenario 3 accommodates precisely this balance by enabling aircraft of up to 30 seats, which can be operated within current runway and airspace settings.
8. A significant opportunity identified through engagement is the potential for Wānaka Airport to strengthen emergency management and community resilience. Over 86% of respondents supported developing the airport into a civil defence and emergency response hub, with broad backing for multi-use hangars, backup power systems and improved medical transfer capabilities. The Egis report notes that these functions integrate effectively with Scenario 3 and would materially improve Wānaka's capacity to respond to seismic or weather-related events that could isolate the region.
9. Community feedback also highlighted opportunities to support and grow local aviation businesses, which currently contribute approximately 250 jobs to the local economy. Respondents strongly supported investment in additional hangars, upgraded utilities, and enhanced training facilities to enable growth in general aviation, maintenance, flight training, and restoration services. Wānaka's geography, scenery, and open airspace position it favourably to become a centre of excellence for general aviation and training, a concept widely supported during engagement.
10. Many respondents also expressed enthusiasm for Wānaka to play a role in low emissions aviation innovation, including testing of electric, hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) aircraft. The Egis report notes high support for attracting aircraft manufacturers and innovators, building on the airport's reputation as a base for Warbirds, scenic flights, and NASA balloon launches. These opportunities are compatible with Scenario 3 and provide pathways for diversification without significant airside expansion.
11. Beyond aviation, the community identified a desire for broader community and event uses of airport land. Events such as Warbirds Over Wānaka are highly valued, and there is openness to expanding similar activities or integrating compatible industrial or commercial uses on the airport land. Engagement suggests these uses could support a more self-sustaining airport model while avoiding inappropriate residential scale recreational uses better located within town.
12. Importantly, the engagement also revealed what the community wishes to avoid. These include any development that would enable larger aircraft, substantial increases in tourism volumes, or shifts toward controlled airspace that could threaten Wānaka's internationally recognised free flight environment. Egis notes that Scenarios 4 and 5 were overwhelmingly opposed for these reasons, while Scenario 3 was seen as the best fit for retaining Wānaka's environmental character, community values and airspace freedoms.

13. Issues of governance, transparency and trust also emerged, with some respondents seeking stronger local oversight, clearer financial reporting and more transparency in planning and operating decisions. While views varied on the preferred governance model, Egis advises that ongoing community involvement will be essential during upcoming Master Plan work.
14. Overall, the engagement points to a coherent community aspiration: a low impact, community-oriented airport that serves local needs, supports general aviation and emergency functions, provides limited regional connectivity, hosts valued events, and fosters sustainable aviation innovation—while protecting Wānaka’s identity, environment and free flight traditions. Scenario 3 offers the most credible and widely supported pathway to realise these outcomes.
15. Looking ahead, the adoption of Scenario 3 provides a clear basis for progressing to a refreshed Wānaka Airport Master Plan. The Egis review advises that this work should be undertaken by an organisation with the appropriate aviation knowledge and skill set required to undertake this work, given the technical, operational and aeronautical requirements of master planning. QLDC’s role will be to provide governance direction, ensure appropriate oversight and meet its statutory obligations.
16. If Scenario 3 is approved, officers will prepare options for how the externally led master planning process could be structured, including commissioning, governance arrangements, sequencing of work, and alignment with ongoing Part 139 compliance activities. This will include consideration of infrastructure staging, airspace requirements, emergency readiness components, opportunities for aviation innovation and training, and compatible land use planning. Preparing these options will allow Council to consider an appropriate approach to delivering the Master Plan in a structured and informed manner.

#### Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

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17. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.
18. Egis assessed five scenarios for the airport’s future. Scenario 3 clearly emerged as the most strongly supported scenario, with 65% support across online respondents and the highest support in in-person workshops. Scenarios 1, 4, and 5 were widely opposed, and Scenario 2 received mixed support but lacked a clear mandate when considered alongside Scenario 3.
19. Option 1 - Scenario 1: Close Wānaka Airport.

Would permanently close the airport and end all aviation activity

*Advantages:*

- Eliminates operational and renewal costs.
- Removes aviation emissions and noise.

- Guarantees fully open airspace.

*Disadvantages:*

- Strongly opposed by the community
- Would permanently close the airport and end all aviation activity.
- Loss of all aviation jobs and businesses.
- Loss of emergency response capability.
- Loss of valued events such as Warbirds Over Wānaka.
- Would have significant decommissioning and transition cost.

20. Option 2 - Scenario 2: General Aviation Only.

Maintains the airport as a general aviation–only facility with no scheduled passenger services.

*Advantages:*

- Mixed support from community
- Provides full certainty for general aviation operators.
- No significant capital investment.
- No airspace changes; protects free-flight activity

*Disadvantages:*

- Strong support from airspace users.
- No scheduled connectivity for residents.
- Ongoing financial pressure and will likely need some ratepayer subsidy.
- Provides for limited economic and aviation sector growth.

21. Option 3 (recommended) - Scenario 3: General Aviation with Limited Scheduled Services (≤30 seats).

Scenario 3 keeps Wānaka Airport focused on general aviation while enabling small scheduled flights to Christchurch (and potentially Wellington). It requires no major airside upgrades and has the strongest community support.

*Advantages:*

- Community's preferred option.
- Supports local connectivity needs.
- Minimal airspace or infrastructure changes.
- Supports existing aviation businesses and employment.
- No immediate capital upgrades beyond those needed for compliance.

*Disadvantages:*

- Requires securing an airline partner.
- Future terminal/parking upgrades may be needed.
- Some airspace concerns remain among recreational users.

22. Option 4 - Scenario 4: Introduce larger domestic routes. This would introduce larger turboprop aircraft (Q300/ATR) and enable potential Auckland services.

*Advantages:*

- Improved national connectivity.
- Potential economic uplift through visitor spending.
- Potential for stronger financial sustainability.

*Disadvantages:*

- Strongly opposed by the community
- Requires major runway, terminal and roading upgrades.
- Significant airspace changes affecting general aviation and free-flight.

- High risk of increased tourism and this option has low community support.
- Commercial viability uncertain for Auckland turboprop services

23. Option 5 - Scenario 5: International Airport.

Would convert Wānaka to an international-capable airport supporting trans-Tasman routes.

*Advantages:*

- Direct international access.
- Potential high tourism and economic uplift.
- Strong revenue potential

*Disadvantages:*

- Requires extensive runway, terminal, customs and air traffic control upgrades.
- Strong community opposition regarding scale, noise and tourism.
- Severe impacts on general aviation and free-flight airspace.
- Long delivery timeline and uncertain airline interest

24. Option 6 - Do nothing /retain the status quo.

No preferred scenario adopted; airport continues operating under current arrangements.

*Advantages:*

- No immediate capital cost.
- Maintains existing general aviation activity

*Disadvantages:*

- Does not provide certainty for planning or operators.
- Does not support connectivity needs.
- Does not align with regulatory direction.

- Perpetuates financial and governance issues.

25. This report recommends **Option 3** for addressing the matter because Scenario 3 represents the option with the strongest level of community support, with 65% support in the online survey and the highest preference expressed during in-person workshops.
26. Scenario 3 would maintain Wānaka Airport’s general aviation activities while enabling limited domestic turboprop services that support medical, social, and economic connectivity for the community. This scenario has minimal implications for airspace, requires only limited capital investment—primarily future terminal or carparking upgrades if demand increases—and aligns with the Part 139 certification work already underway. It also remains consistent with community values by avoiding the scale of development associated with increased tourism or jet aircraft operations.

### Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

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#### Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

27. This matter is of high significance, as determined by reference to the Council’s Significance and Engagement Policy 2024 because of the level of community interest, potential economic and social implications, and the strategic importance of Wānaka Airport as a district asset, however noting that the outcome of creating a new Master Plan is mandatory under CAA qualifying status.
28. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are residents/ratepayers of the Queenstown Lakes district community, general aviation operators and commercial airport users; community and business groups; Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), civil defence and emergency services with an interest in airport-based capability; and airspace/recreation users.
29. The Egis review reflects extensive and high-quality engagement with the community.

#### Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

30. The Council will include engagement with iwi and rūnaka as part of early design and strategy formation during the Master Plan development.

### Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

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31. This matter relates to the Regulatory/Legal/Compliance risk category. It is associated with RISK10006 Ineffective planning for property and infrastructure within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a high residual risk rating.
32. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to implement additional controls for this risk. This will be achieved by implementing the externally led master planning process in alignment with ongoing Part 139 compliance activities and community expectations i.e. Scenario 3.

### Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

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33. Scenario 3 involves no immediate capital expenditure beyond existing Part 139 compliance requirements. Future costs relate to potential terminal and carparking upgrades only after sustained airline demand is established.

### Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

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34. The recommended option aligns with Vision Beyond 2050, district wide climate objectives, and long-term community wellbeing goals. It does not conflict with existing policies and is consistent with the Long Term Plan's commitment to community led airport decision-making.

### Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

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35. Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. Scenario 3 promotes the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the community by providing proportionate connectivity, supporting local businesses, strengthening emergency resilience, and respecting Wānaka's natural environment and character. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

36. The recommended option:

- Can be implemented through current funding under the Long Term Plan and Annual Plan;
- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not significantly alter the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

### Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

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A	Wānaka Airport Future Review – Community Engagement Results and Recommendations (Egis)
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Attachment circulated separately.