

Item 2: Wānaka Airport Future Review Community Engagement

SESSION TYPE: Workshop

PURPOSE/DESIRED OUTCOME:

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

Independent consultant team to provide summary of first round of engagement results and lead discussion on draft scenarios for feedback/questions.

DATE/TIME:

Tuesday, 19 August 2025 at 10.30am

TIME BREAKDOWN:

Presentation: 60 min
Questions or Debate/Discussion: 30 minutes

Prepared by:



Name: Paul Speedy
Title: Manager Strategic Projects
11 August 2025

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Meaghan Miller
Title: Corporate Services GM
11 August 2025

ATTACHMENTS:

A	Meeting Agenda Notes
B	Early Community Engagement Summary

QLDC WORKSHOP - WĀNAKA AIRPORT FUTURE REVIEW

MEETING AGENDA NOTES

Location	Gorge Rd Council Chambers
Date and Time	19/08/2025, 10:30 – 12:00
Facilitators	Geoff Anderson (Egis – in-person), Kerr Forbes (Egis – via MS Teams), Niels van Toor (Egis – via MS Teams)
Participants	QLDC

ITEM	TOPIC/DISCUSSION ITEM	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
1.	Introductions	Geoff Anderson
2.	Summary of First Round of Engagement Results	Geoff Anderson
3.	Provide Draft Scenarios for Discussion	Geoff Anderson
4.	Receive Feedback and Questions on Draft Scenarios	Geoff Anderson

AGENDA NOTES

Please refer to the accompanying **Early Community Engagement Summary** for details

Summary of First Round of Engagement Results

Upon completion of the initial round of community engagement Egis, with Isthmus and Mike Haines is complete, feedback and results have been collected. Insights into the engagement:

- 261 online responses
- 2,230 project page visits
- 4 weeks of online survey uptime
- 2 days of in-person Wānanga Community Drop-in Sessions
- 90-100 in person participants
- 6 email submissions
- Engagement with specific user groups and stakeholders

Geoff will go through the results of the first round of engagement with the QLDC with support from the Egis team to answer any questions and further data analytics.

Provide Draft Scenarios for Discussion

Draft scenarios and complimentary options have been generated. There will be some mutually exclusive options which we will play back to the community to determine how the community wants its airport to serve them.

Complimentary options are additional options which work with any of the scenarios to clarify how the airport should be considered and better show what the community finds most important in how the airport fits into the local context.

We will present these during the QLDC Workshop, provide background context on the scenarios, explain the benefits and implications of each of the scenarios assessed against various criteria. We will also link the data from the first round of engagement to the generation of these scenarios.

Receive Feedback and Questions on Draft Scenarios

Ahead of finalisation and release of the scenarios and options, we will seek QLDC feedback and answer questions on the scenarios. This will help direct the communication of these options and address any potential gaps or nuances that may arise.

DRAFT FOR QLDC Workshop 19 August 2025 Wānaka Future Airport Study

Early Community Engagement Summary



WANAKA AIRPORT

Community Engagement – Early Insights

Online Survey

16 June to 15 July

In-person workshop

27 and 28 June

Who we heard from

- Public online and in-person consultation
- Wānaka Stakeholders Group
- Wānaka Airport Users Group
- Wānaka Airport Advisory Group
- Email submissions

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

6 Email Submissions





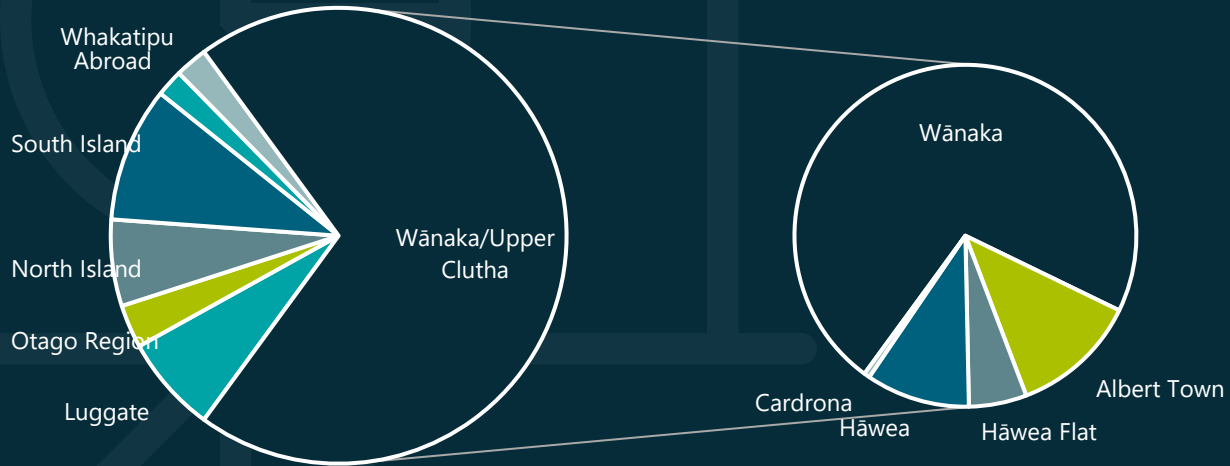
Community Wānanga/ Drop-in Session 1

27-28 June 2025

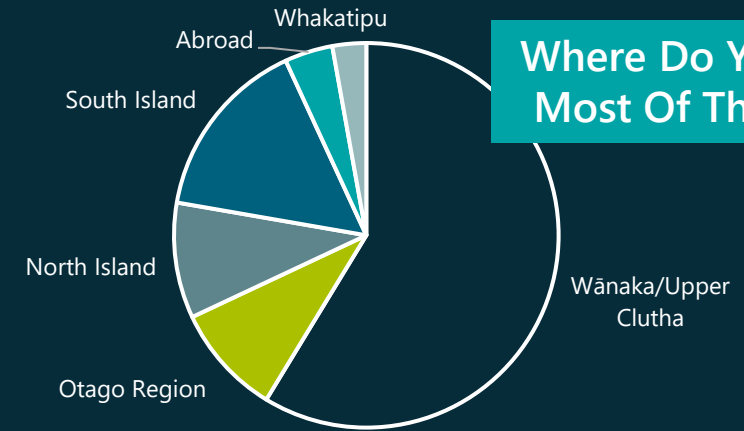
Listening to the Community

Snapshot of Results

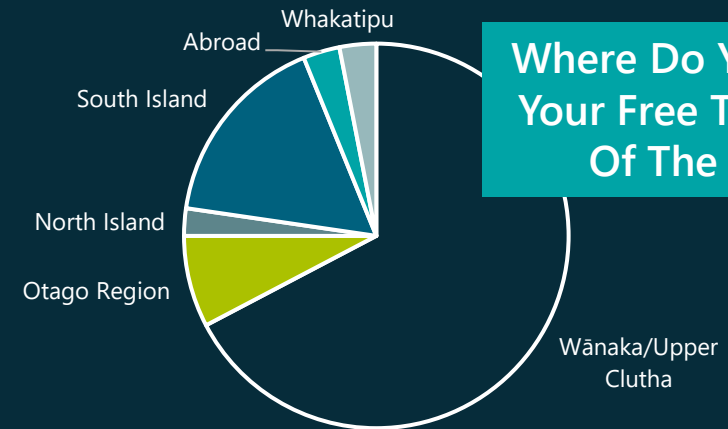
Where Do You Live Most Of The Time?



Where Do You Work Most Of The Time?

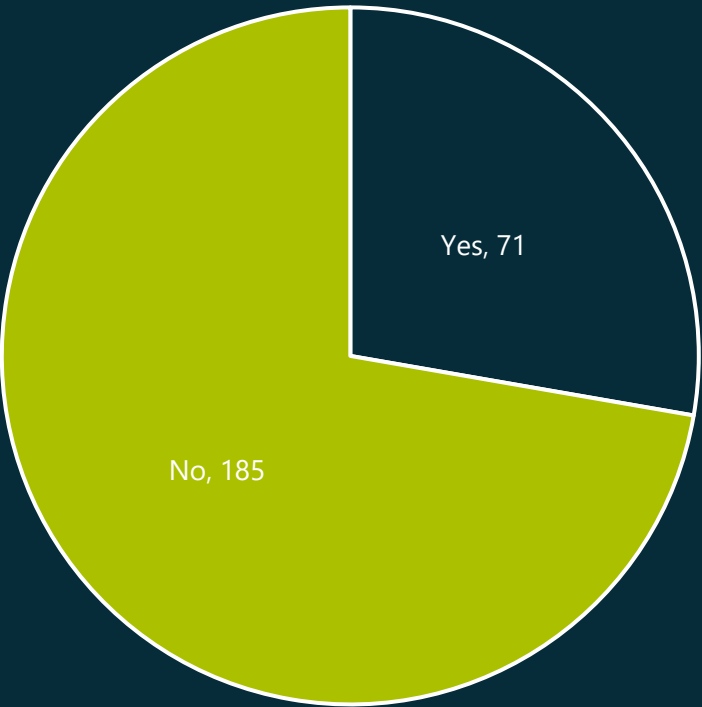


Where Do You Spend Your Free Time Most Of The Time?

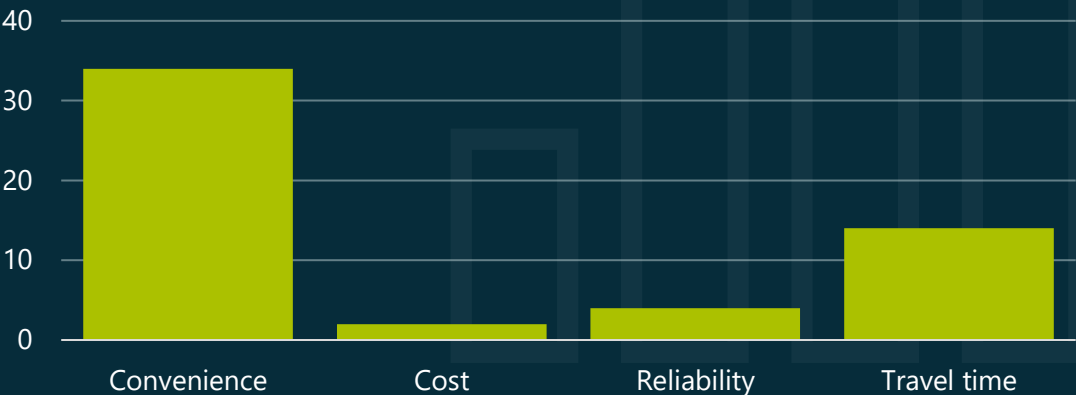


Do You Use the Airport?

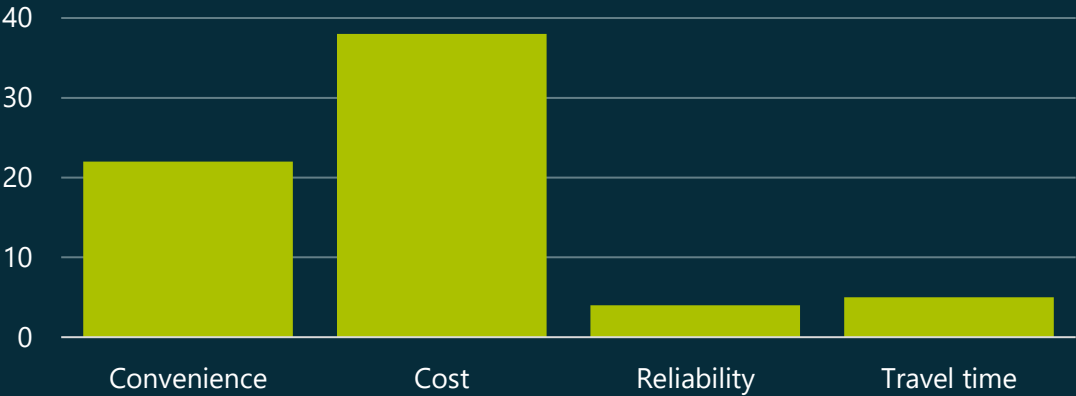
Do You Currently Use Wānaka Airport?



If YES, What Is The Reason For This?

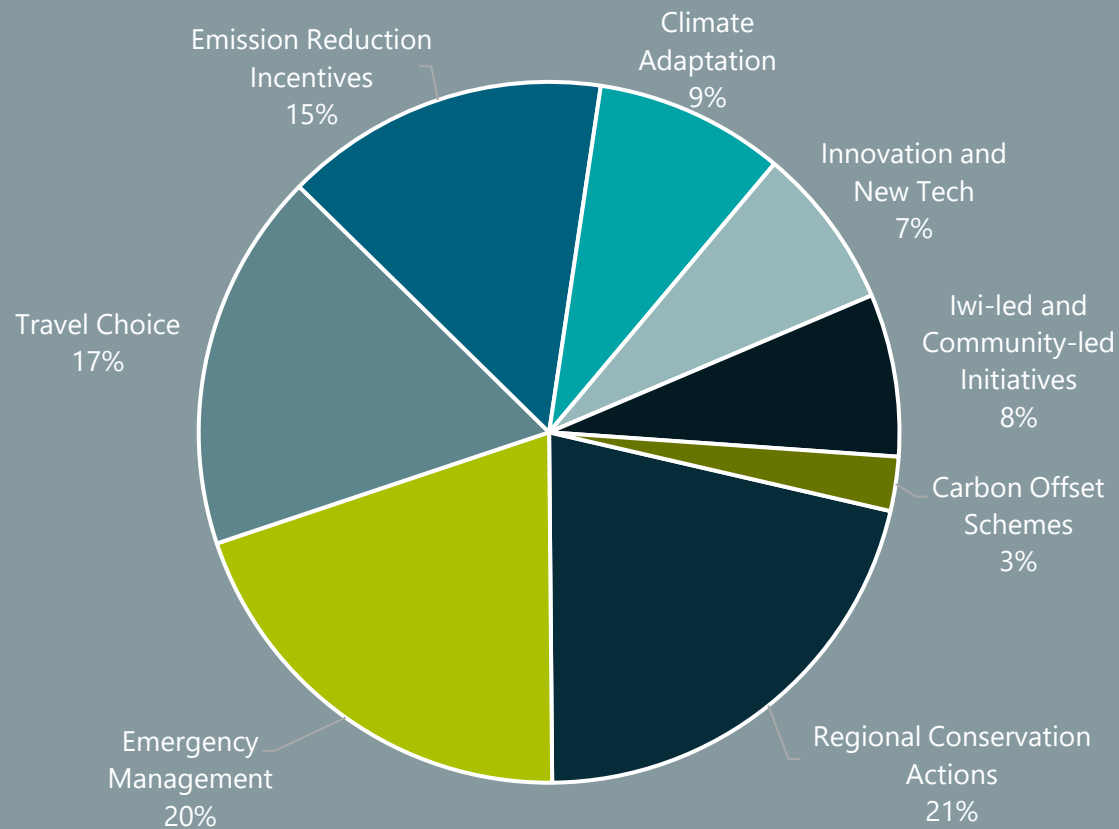


If NO, What Is The Reason For This?

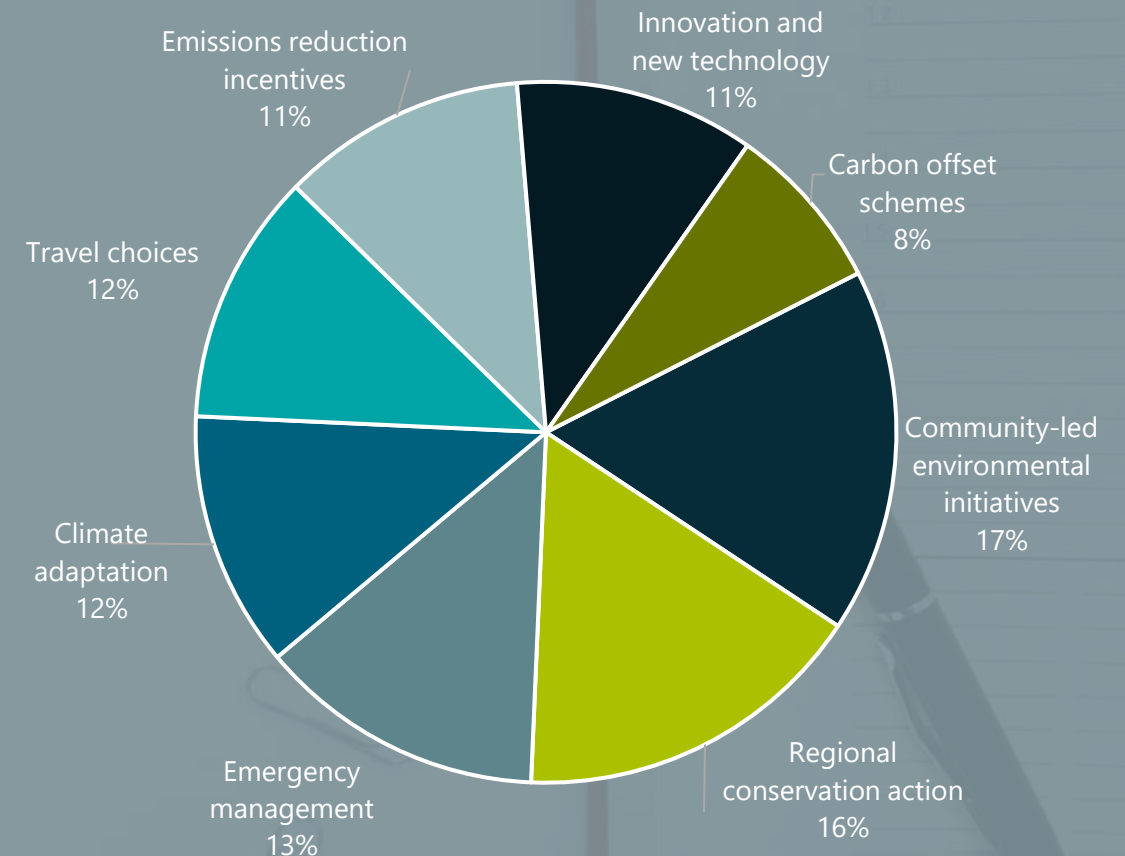


Important Outcomes

What environmental outcomes should we prioritise?

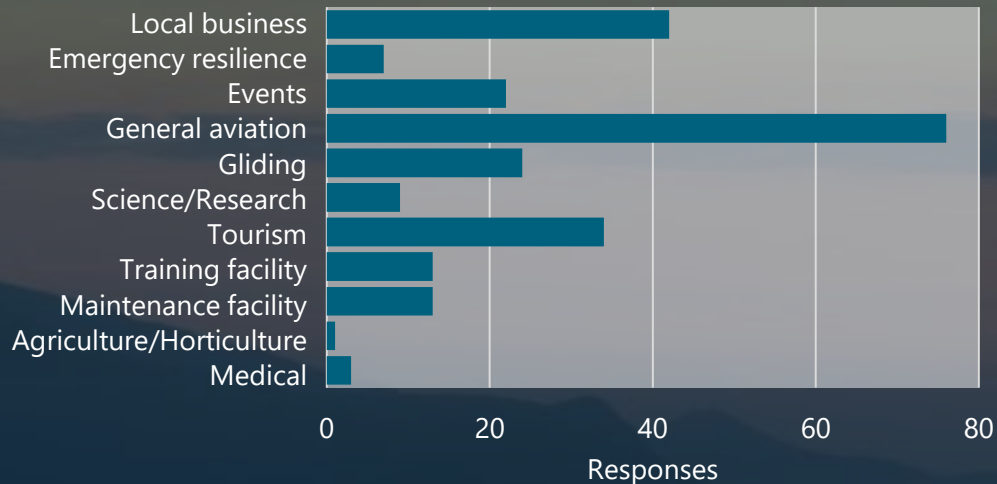


What Aspects Of Environmental Stewardship Do You Think Apply Most To Wānaka/Upper Clutha?



Current Uses and Concerns About Wānaka Airport

Current Uses



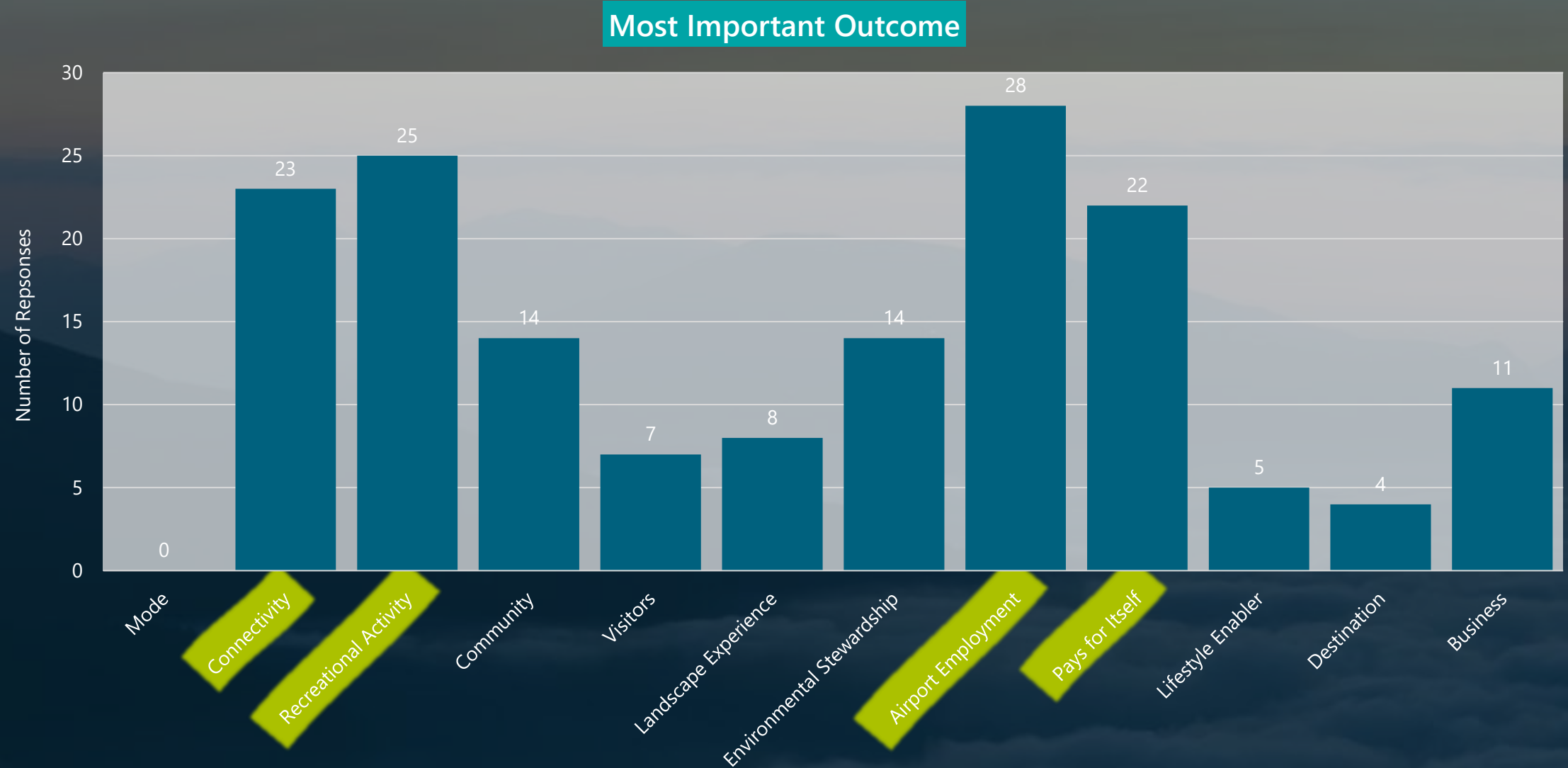
- **Local business** – the current business users such as parachuting, scenic flights, helicopters, etc
- **Emergency resilience** – Using the airport as an Emergency Services hub and plan for emergency responses for events such as earthquakes
- **Events** – Warbirds over Wānaka, NASA balloon launch, Wheels at Wānaka
- **General aviation** – small-scale civil aviation such as planes and helicopters
- **Gliding** – Hang gliding and paragliding
- **Science/Research** – Centre of excellence for innovative future technologies such as electric, SAF or H2 planes, and scientific launches
- **Tourism** – Tourists coming into the town and general aviation activities that tourists use, scenic flights, skydiving, etc
- **Training facility** – Wānaka has a good physical location for flight schools as the region has mountainous terrain and quiet airspace
- **Maintenance facility** – the GA activities require maintenance of the aircraft
- **Agriculture/Horticulture** – use of aircraft for agricultural or horticultural purposes
- **Medical** – med-evac flights

Concerns



- **Noise** – sound generated by aircraft
- **Congestion** – increased traffic
- **Overtourism** – increasing visitor numbers beyond what the local infrastructure can tolerate
- **Emissions** – impacting the local and global environment by promoting additional airtravel
- **Environment** – impact to Lake Wānaka and the region, environmental protections
- **Infrastructure, Roads and Utilities** that could be prioritised over the airport
- **Airspace Restrictions** – how potential changes such as commercial flights to Christchurch could impact the current users of the airport and local airspace

What are The Important Outcomes For You?

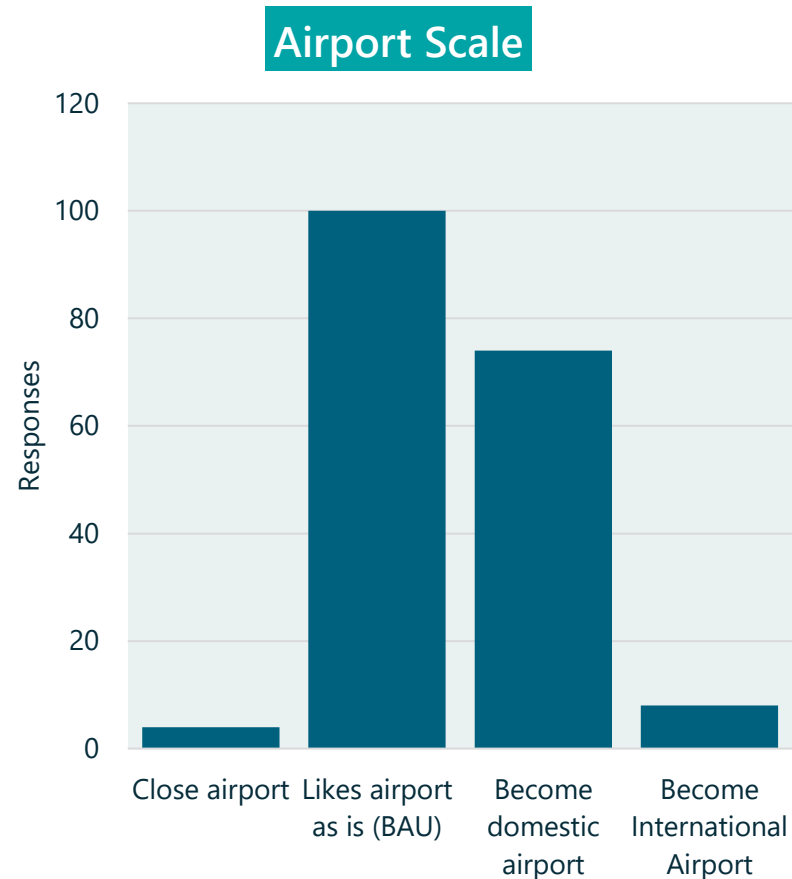




Future of Wānaka Airport

Future of Wānaka Airport

Responses that indicated how people wanted the future of the airport to look were classified into:



There was **overwhelming support** for the current uses and users of the airport and the possibility of attracting links to other New Zealand centres such as Christchurch, Wellington or Auckland.

There was **very weak support** for either closing the airport or aiming to become an international airport.

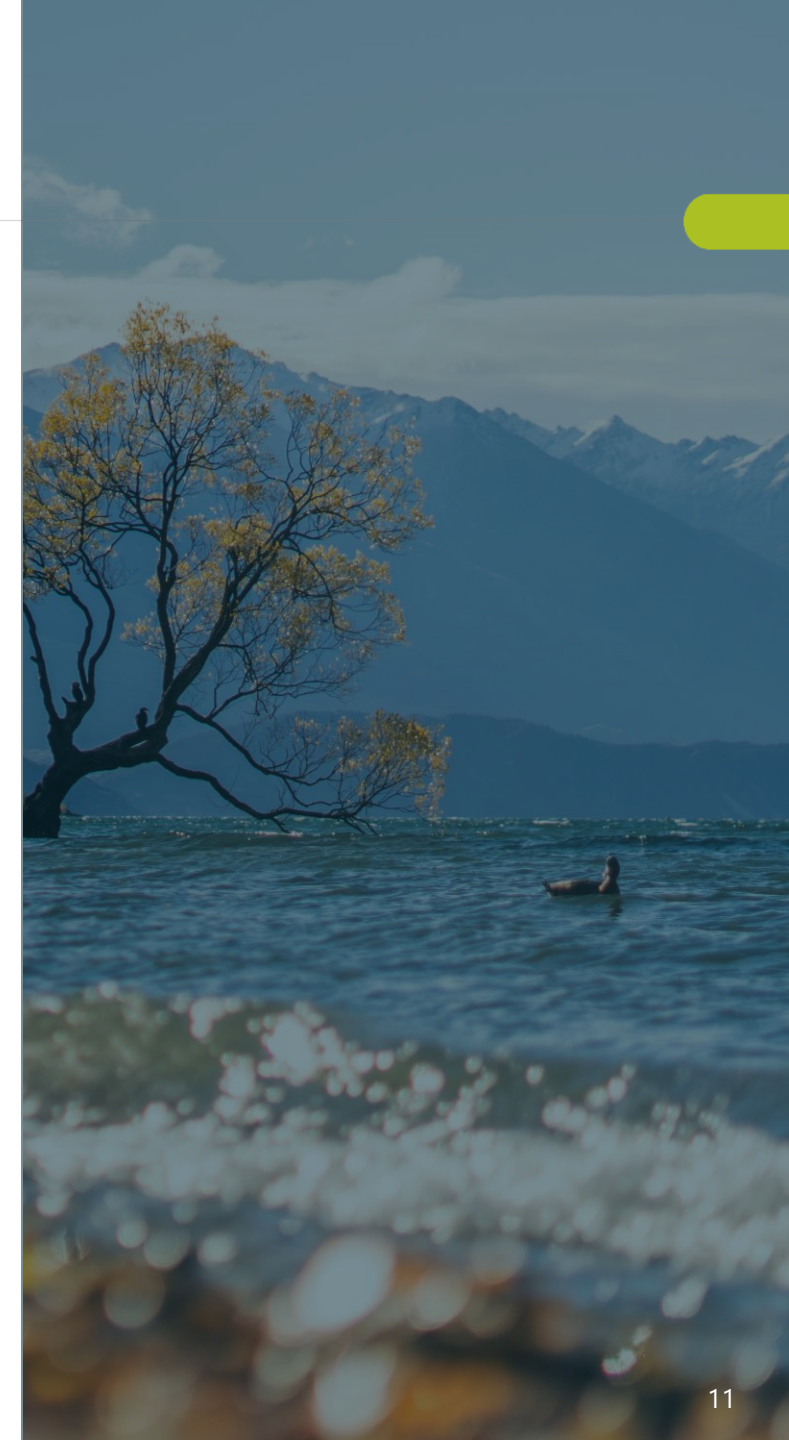
Future Development and Operations

No questions were posed about the current or potential future operations or development at the airport. But there were a lot of responses which discussed how the airport could or should be operated and what financial drivers the airport should have.

These ranged from the airport should be aimed at the current local businesses and their operations to whether the airport should be aiming to be bigger and becoming more like Queenstown. There was a lot of support for the current businesses using the airport and there was support for more connectivity to be provided to locals via the airport. This is was especially true for links to Christchurch and Auckland.

There were also a lot of responses on how much the airport should or should not be developed.

The second stage of engagement will cover this topic to clarify how the community feels the airport should be operated.



SWOT Analysis – What You Identified

Location

Wānaka has a beautiful and unique location which attracts tourists and new residents. The terrain makes for world-class gliding and flight training locations

General Aviation Services

The current GA system works very well with helicopters and general aviation, making 50,000 annual movements

Employment

Local employment opportunities for tourism, flights, maintenance and supporting jobs

Small Airport

The small airport means that the current users have ease of access, lower costs for the local taxpayers and less noise

Events

Warbirds on Wānaka and NASA launch bring prestige to the town as well as significant boosts to the local economy with the associated travel

Businesses/Commercial Outlets

The current businesses using the airport are ongoing, successful and provide local jobs

STRENGTH

WEAKNESS

Infrastructure/Utilities

Wānaka overall has Infrastructure and Utility gaps

Management and Oversight

Has local opposition and trust issues

Cost Recovery

The airport does not cover its own costs and is subsidised by the local QLDC ratepayers

Cost to Use

Costs for airport users have increased

Lack Of Vision

There is no recent masterplan, and this region of NZ has multiple competing ideas on how to address the air travel demand

Hazardous Entry/Exit To Airport

Road entry into the airport



OPPORTUNITIES

Domestic Flights

Flights to Christchurch, Auckland or Wellington

More GA Offerings, Hangars, Training, Etc

Enable the current users to grow

Emergency Resilience

Be prepared for future emergencies and medical evacuations

Land

The airport has a large, mostly unused land holding

Innovation

The quiet airspace and terrain make for a uniquely positive place to conduct flight training and prove new aircraft such as SAF, H2 or electric craft

Make airport Profitable

Have the airport cover its costs and/or generate a profit margin

THREATS

Overtourism

Tourists beyond what the town can handle

Management

QLDC / QAC management is perceived as disconnected with the wants or needs of the users

Potential Airspace Restrictions

Changing how the airspace currently operates

Readiness to Respond

May not be adequate to respond in significant emergency, lack of back up options such as generators.

Jets

Potential noise and tourist numbers

Inflation of Running Costs

As seen with Sounds Air pulling out of Wānaka. Costs in the industry are rising quickly. The certification that the airport now needs to maintain will also add cost.

Themes from Wānaka Airport Users Group



General Aviation currently working well at airport and people want to keep it as a General Aviation airport even if more connections are added

Airport has good integration of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft

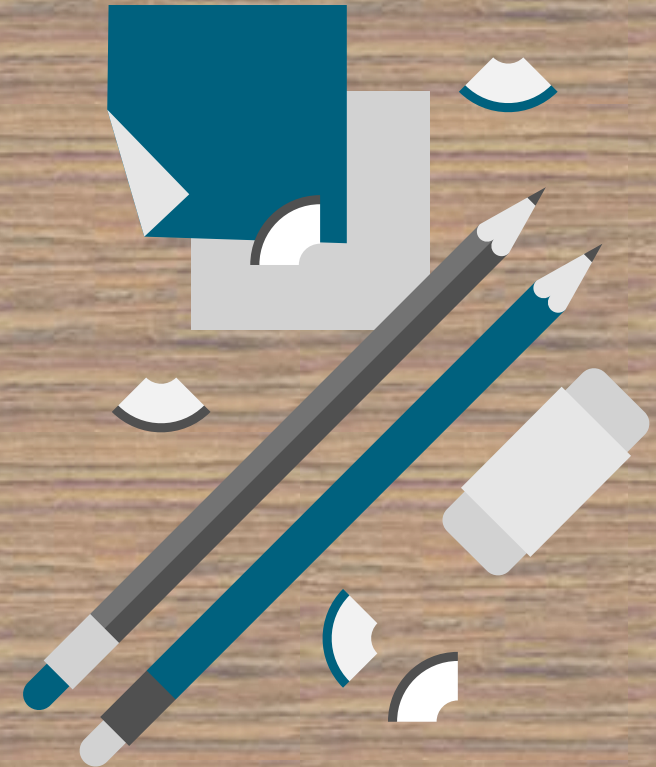
The group is generally against significant changes in operations or jets. There are also concerns about becoming similar to Queenstown Airport if these occur

The airport employs a lot of local people

Fuel and maintenance facilities could be improved

Hangars and flight trainee accommodation would be welcome

There are infrastructure gaps for Wanaka i.e. sewage, water, fibre and power connection



Additional submissions and stakeholder discussions

There were a number of email submissions or stakeholder discussions, these were from:

- FlightPlan2050
- Kelvin Peninsula Community Association
- We Love Wakatipu
- Destination Queenstown & Lake Wānaka Tourism
- Southern Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club
- Wānaka Stakeholders Group

Theme	FlightPlan2050	Kelvin Peninsula Community Association	We Love Wakatipu	Destination Queenstown & Lake Wānaka Tourism	Southern Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club	Wānaka Stakeholder Group
Support for General Aviation	Supports GA and recreational use	Not discussed	Not discussed	Supports Queenstown Airport in current form; no expansion needed in Wānaka	Supports Wānaka as a GA and recreational airfield with any investment targeted at existing users	Want GA and associated businesses to thrive at Wānaka Airport
Environmental Sustainability	Central theme; advocates for climate-aligned planning at a regional level	Not discussed	Emphasises climate resilience and low-carbon future	Regenerative tourism plan prioritises carbon zero by 2030 and environmental restoration	Free flight seen as low-impact; a small Wānaka airport aligns with sustainability goals	Express concerns about sustainability impacts
Community Voice or Governance	Advocates for transparent, inclusive planning that takes in the communities of the region	States that as the South island aviation network is related so multiple communities should be considered for airport planning	Strong emphasis on fair process and regional equity with considerations for airport planning to be taken at a regional level	Calls for community-led, values-based planning	Calls for local governance and formal representation of free flight and general aviation users	Support governance by an elected Upper Clutha board and call for independence from Queenstown airport and QAC

Theme	FlightPlan2050	Kelvin Peninsula Community Association	We Love Wakatipu	Destination Queenstown & Lake Wānaka Tourism	Southern Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club	Wānaka Stakeholder Group
Tourism Strategy Alignment	Supports value-over-volume tourism and tourism being aligned to climate change adaption	Airport load for tourism should be shared regionally, with Queenstown, Invercargill and Dunedin	Aligns with regenerative tourism principles	Anchored in regenerative tourism strategy; supports quality over quantity	Encourages recognition of free flight's tourism value	Believes that QAC need to demonstrate that it can met NZ's tourism sustainability strategy.
Cultural & Recreational Values	Emphasises protection of landscape and cultural identity	Not discussed	Advocates for preserving community character and liveability	Supports tourism that reflects local values and enhances community wellbeing	Highlights national and global significance of Wānaka's free flight environment	Supports Warbirds Over Wānaka and its recreational aviation legacy
Opposition to Jet Expansion	Opposed; cites environmental, social, and cultural risks	Respects Wānaka opposition to any commercial jets using the airport but states that it is at the cost to Queenstown residents	Argues that Queenstown bears unfair burden of being a thoroughfare for Wānaka visitors and locals. States that a new airport such as Tarras should be considered.	Opposed to Tarras jet airport; misaligned with regenerative tourism goals	Jet-capable expansion should be prevented unless overwhelming, demonstrated community support is secured through fair and transparent consultation	Against jet development and Considers duplicating Queenstown Airport to be unnecessary



How Does Wānaka Airport Currently Enable A 'Wānaka Lifestyle'?

With minimal commercial plane use.

Doesn't as you can't fly in commercially.

It provides an operational base for those with their own aircraft. Provides a variety of skilled employment and educational opportunities, Tourism adventures and attractions.

It doesn't, the connection to the rest of the country is poor, so instead I regularly drive to Queenstown to fly from there.

By fostering GA and the light aircraft community, it provides recreational opportunities for many.

It is a globally valuable infrastructure base for effective mountain flight training.

There are lots of small businesses operating there that support employment and provide services to locals and tourists.

It would contribute significantly more if reasonably priced airfares were available on medium-sized planes.

Wings Over Wānaka.

Events, tourists, rural access.

Gateway to airborne adventure sports.

A place for search and rescue helicopters to be serviced.

Support keeping this as a local GA airport with no changes to the airspace. Paragliding in this region is one of the top ten places to come to in the world and is the number 1 in New Zealand.

We Asked About The Future Of Wānaka Airport, Here Is What You Said

It could become an aviation centre of excellence for emerging and growing businesses.

Continuing to enhance our current lifestyles, not as a major port for visitors, but as a connector to other centres.

Wānaka could be used for more regional flight connectivity.

Keep it small and local without commercial big planes to maintain its unique place in New Zealand's Aviation scene.

Air New Zealand flights to CHC, WLG and AKL. Especially AKL to connect with international flights.

Increases domestic connections to main centres in NZ, reducing the need for vehicle movements to Queenstown.

Wānaka airspace area to remain open for free flight.

I hope to see the airport remain mostly unchanged.

Continues to support the local businesses that currently use it.

Keep the status quo.

I worry that words like potential and development mean more people, and that spoils what is here.

More of What You Said

In the event of a civil emergency, we would be cut off for a considerable time, and the 2nd busiest place in Wānaka would be the Airport. In the longer term, this requires a much larger structure overall.

On behalf of The New Zealand Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, representing over 1700 Members, Commercial Operators and International Pilot Visitors - We strongly oppose any development that would transform Wānaka Airport into a jet-capable commercial airport.

On behalf of Warbirds Over Wānaka, we are very keen to ensure we are able to continue to bring our successful international event to this town. Warbirds has contributed more than \$300 million in economic benefit to the region over its 38-year history. The current airport structure serves us well. If change is to occur, we need the QAC, QLDC and all other vested parties to work together and with us to retain the Airshow.

I do not see community value in it becoming another "commercial airport". The "more of the same" approach to growth is dumb, we need to shift away from old models and approaches if we are to see new growth that is not dependent on the tourist dollar.

Infrastructure does not support more visitors now. This needs to change first.

Increased commercial aviation opportunities in Wānaka, offering commercial flights to other NZ regions and also to Australia, would lower the number of people having to use the Crown Range Road and may actually reduce the number of accidents which occur on this road.



What Next - Scenario Development

In-person workshops
29 and 30 August

Online engagement
25 August to 18 September

What Next - Scenario Development

There has been a strong, coherent response from the community, the stakeholders and the representative groups.

We are seeing mutually exclusive scenarios that describe the potential future uses of the airport.

We intend to play back the mutually exclusive scenarios to the community in the second round of engagement and vote.

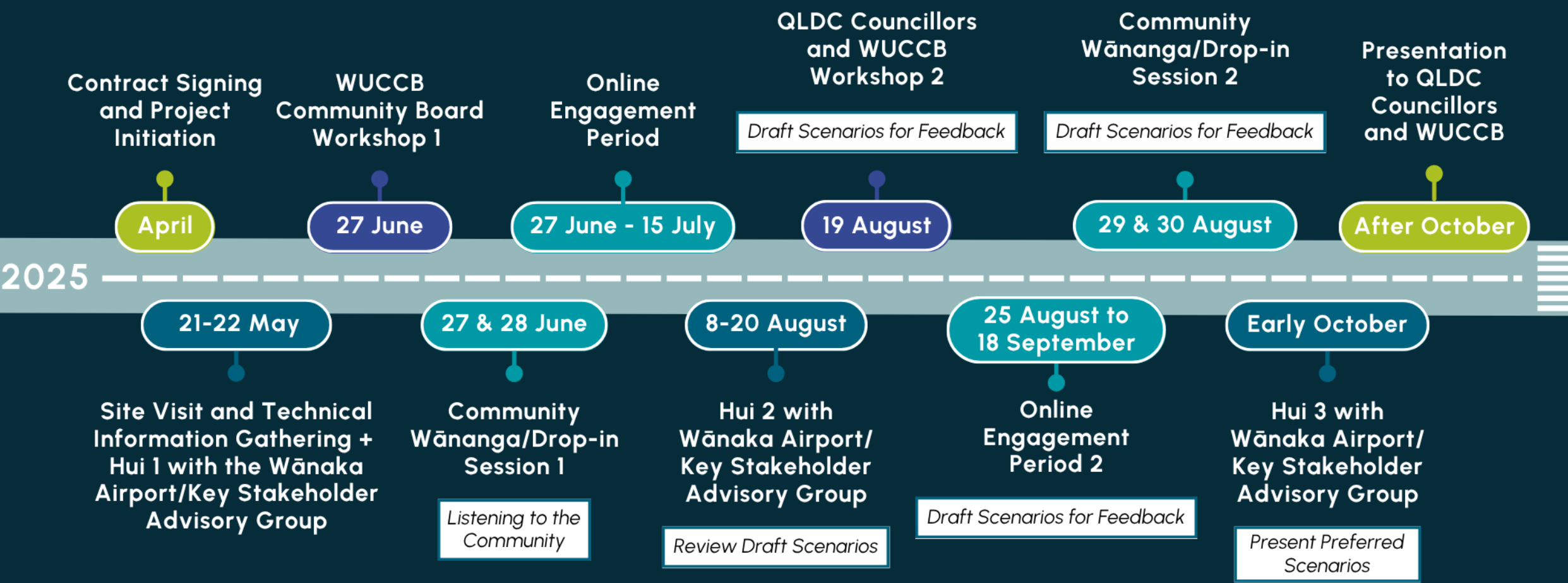
We are also seeing some additional supplementary options on airport future uses that could be implemented in addition to the mutually exclusive scenarios.

In the second round of engagement, we would like to put these to the community and stakeholders for evaluation.

Following round two of engagement, we intend to present the community and stakeholders with clear preferences on future use scenarios for the airport.

Advisory Group to meet again prior to the online engagement going live on 25 August to brief and test the scenarios and options with the Advisory Group.

Project Timeline





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