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**THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF
A MERGER OF THE KAIPARA DISTRICT
WITH THE NORTHERN PART OF THE
FORMER RODNEY DISTRICT TO FORM
A NEW UNITARY LOCAL AUTHORITY**

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Proposed Kaipara -North Rodney Unitary Authority



Source: Kaipara District Council meeting agenda / NZ Herald graphic

For a detailed map of the Kaipara District see: 'Kaipara District Council – Kaipara District Map'

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – For a more detailed list of conclusions see Section 22

1.0 Although a new North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority:

- may give property owners who live in the North Rodney area (but not those who live in the Kaipara District) more say over what is done or is not done in ‘their’ area; (and)
- will result in a local council that can be expected to engage more meaningfully with the local populace than the Auckland Council does; (and)
- North Rodney stakeholders would more easily be able to hold their Council to account;

such a change will require the rates and charges to be higher than they are now. It is not possible to say ‘how much’ higher they will have to be but they will have to be higher - and relating to water supply and wastewater will be significantly higher.

2.0 There are questions about how the water supply and wastewater systems would be owned, funded, managed and operated and the Department of Internal Affairs’ approval for any desired change to the way that is presently done (or, in Kaipara’s case, proposed to be done) will be required. If such approval is not forthcoming the proposal will not be able to proceed.

3.0 There are also questions about the ownership, management and funding of regional parks, coastal foreshores and waterways (including the Hauraki Gulf), Auckland regional facilities, public transport, libraries, and road and footpaths – and about communities of interest, how the relevant provisions of Auckland Council’s Unitary Plan would be transferred, and what the commencing and projected total debt of a new Unitary Authority (and its affordability) might be.

4.0 A new headquarters building that could cost in the order of \$15/\$20 million will have to be acquired in Warkworth, a new IT system developed, and a new Unitary Authority could expect to have to employ 400/450 people with an annual salary bill of about \$40/\$45m.

5.0 A lot more work is needed to prove the justification for three regional authorities instead of two and:

- based on the issues identified in this paper (and)
- the fact that a detailed financial analysis to more accurately prove the likely financial effect cannot be prepared without Auckland Council’s full cooperation and constructive participation – (and given the time and cost involved in doing that, and the Mayor’s publicly expressed reaction to the proposal, that is unlikely); (and)
- the Government’s expressed intention to reduce the number of local authorities and strengthen the way water supply and wastewater are currently managed in New Zealand,

a compelling case to illustrate the viability and clear benefits of a new Unitary Authority isn’t possible and the matter is not worth pursuing any further.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The suggestion has been made that the northern part of what was formerly the Rodney District (approximately 30/35% of the Auckland Region) should secede from Auckland Council and be merged with the Kaipara District Council as a Unitary Authority.

Such a district would stretch from Muriwai to north of Dargaville on the west coast and from Puhoi to North of Mangawhai on the east coast and be responsible for both district council and regional council functions.

However a point that needs to be made clear from the outset is while the other party involved (the Rodney Northern Action Group) may support the idea, from the Kaipara District Council's point of view this is not at this stage a formal proposal. The Kaipara Mayor explains his Council's stance as follows:

'There has been considerable media attention recently around the Northern Action Group's proposal regarding a merger between Kaipara District Council and Northern Rodney (currently part of Auckland Council) to form a predominantly rural-coastal unitary authority. As a council, we discussed their idea at a recent meeting and agreed it could be included as one of the options referenced in our own submission on the Simplifying Local Government proposals. However, despite how some reports have framed it, it is not a formal standalone proposal from us, nor is it something currently on the table in any official sense. Auckland is not part of the government's proposed reforms and it has been confirmed that the timing of the reforms wouldn't allow it. Kaipara remains committed to working with our Northland neighbours on both Local Water Done Well and the upcoming Simplifying Local Government reform.'

Source: Jonatan Larsen - Kaipara District Mayor – 'Mayor's Report February 2026'

These notes identify the matters that will need to be considered if the matter ever becomes the subject of a formal proposal and the potential consequences of any such change.

2.0 A NEW UNITARY AUTHORITY WOULD STRADDLE TWO REGIONS

Any such merger would result in a local authority with a total population of about 80,000 that would straddle the current boundary between the Auckland and Northland regions and result in there being three regions instead.

- Kaipara (with an estimated population of 26,800) is currently in the Northland Region; (and)
- North Rodney (with a roughly estimated population of about 50,000) is currently in the Auckland Region.

Note: The 26,800 Kaipara figure is from the 2023 census. The 50,000 North Rodney figure is as stated by the Northern Action Group (NAG) and has not been checked.

All of the Kaipara District's functions, Northland Regional Council functions that relate to the Kaipara District, and all Auckland Council functions (both district and regional) that relate to the Northern Rodney area will transfer to the proposed new Unitary Council.

3.0 NO COMMERCIAL CENTRE - LITTLE COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

The new local authority's district would include Warkworth, Snells Beach/Algies Bay, Kawau Island, Omaha, Matakana, Baddeleys Beach, Buckletons Beach, Leigh, Pakiri/Te Arai, Puhoi, Helensville, and Wellsford – Kaiwaka, Maungatoroto, Paparoa, Dargaville and Mangawhai (and all the rural areas in between).

It would not include the Hibiscus Coast (Orewa, Whangaparaoa, Silverdale, Millwater, Milldale, ARA Hills, Westhoe Heights, and Waiwera – including Wenderholm Regional Park, Kumeu/Huapai, Waimauku, Coatesville, Riverhead, Wainui, Dairy Flat and Redvale – all of which would remain in the Auckland Region.

- The western boundary will stretch from the Waipoua State Forest north of Dargaville to just north of Muriwai – a distance of about 220 km.
- The new local authority will not have 'a distinct commercial or residential centre',
- All of the North Rodney communities' main city focus is Auckland whilst Kaipara's is towards Whangarei.

Kaipara District's northern boundary (on the west coast) is in fact north of Whangarei. The four distinctly different rural/residential catchments:

- o Warkworth/Snells Beach/Algies Bay/Sandspit/Matakana/Point Wells/Omaha/Tawharanui/Buckletons/Baddelys/Leigh and Wellsford;
- o Helensville/Kaukapakapa;
- o Maungatoroto/Paparoa/Dargaville; (and)
- o Mangawhai/Kaiwaka

have little community of interest with each other.

- Dargaville (population 5,170 - where Kaipara's headquarters now are) is just 57 km west of Whangarei, (and about 116 km from Warkworth and 174 km from Auckland)
- Mangawhai Heads and Mangawhai Township (population approximately 4,200) are about 42 km from Warkworth, 72 km from Whangarei and 100km from Auckland.

Identifying the 'Communities of Interest' is a fundamental first step when considering any local government proposed reorganisation and the Local Government Commission carried out such a study for Rodney in 2017. The conclusion it reached then was:

‘..... there are many communities of interest in the Rodney areas of Warkworth, Wellsford, Kumeu and Dairy Flat. While this reflects elements of a common North Rodney, South Rodney and broader Rodney identity, the communities of interest to which they relate are not strong nor are they necessarily exclusive to those areas. Rather, these communities of interest vary and overlap with surrounding areas particularly wider Auckland.

Ongoing improvements to transport and technology along with expected medium to high growth in Rodney mean the connections between Rodney and wider Auckland will continue to evolve and grow stronger. This is also likely to result in stronger communities of interest between each of these four areas’.

Source: Local Government Commission – ‘Communities Of Interest Study – Rodney – Auckland Reorganisation Process’ 2017

The comments in the above last paragraph are undoubtedly correct. Since 2017 the State Highway 1 Motorway (110 kmph to Orewa) has been extended to Warkworth and preliminary work has started on it being further extended to Te Hana (north of Wellsford) – again planned to be 110 kph.

4.0 A NEW HEADQUARTERS BUILDING IN WARKWORTH WOULD BE REQUIRED

The logical place for a North Rodney/Kaipara Council’s headquarters would be Warkworth.

- Such a new head office complex could be expected to cost something like \$15/\$20 million (depending upon what the staff structure is to be, and where the staff are to be located) and with the time required to agree exactly what is needed, select and purchase a suitable site, design the proposed complex, complete any necessary public consultation, obtain building and resource consent and an approved budget, and let and complete a construction contract, take probably at least two years from the date of the new Council’s establishment to complete.
 - There are currently no service centres at all (other than for minor issues at some of the libraries) in Northern Rodney.
 - Kaipara has service centres at Dargaville and Managawhai. These would probably continue but in a very much scaled down way.
- As an indication of the required ‘size’ and cost of a new headquarters building, when the former Rodney District merged with Auckland in 2010 it did not have the regional functions that a Unitary Council would and its then office complex in Orewa is reported to have had a rateable value (in 2020) of \$28.8 million. The 1.9 ha site was sold for a reported \$15.1 million in 2020.

Source: Local Matters – ‘Council Site Goes In Fire Sale’ 15 June 2020

- The restoration work on the Warkworth Town Hall cost \$5.6 million in 2017 and took two and a half years.

Source: Auckland Council – Our Auckland – ‘Trust Raises \$425,000 For Warkworth Town Hall Restoration’ July 2018

- The cost of office furnishings and equipment would be additional. Few furnishings and office equipment would be likely to transfer from Auckland Council.
- Temporary office accommodation could be required for at least two years and as was learned when the former Rodney County amalgamated with a large part of the former Waitemata County in 1974 the task of setting up a new organisation like that proposed, with so many office vacancies (see section 6) and without having properly established office premises to operate from for more than two years (in that case more than three years), can be very difficult indeed.

5.0 A NEW IT SYSTEM WOULD BE REQUIRED

Although Kaipara Council’s current IT system (from the point of view of a casual user) seems to be quite good and ‘user friendly’ it would not be sufficient for a new Council with three times the population and a differently structured Unitary requirement.

Auckland Council has made huge strides in the past few years towards getting its customers to communicate with it via the internet. Its website is excellent and always improving. A new Unitary Authority is unlikely to be able to afford to provide and maintain an IT system of the same quality.

If Auckland Council was prepared to do so, the adaption of some of its IT systems for the new Council may be possible.

6.0 400/450 STAFF WOULD PROBABLY BE REQUIRED

A new staff structure would have to be established.

- The total number of staff required could be of the order of 400/450 with a salary bill of about \$40/\$45 million per year.

Kaipara, with a population of 26,800 (and presently not having any regional functions) currently employs *172 - 161 full time equivalents (FTEs) with approximately half stationed at Dargaville and half at Mangawhai.

***Source:** Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report – Page 162

- By way of comparison:

- The Far North District, with a population of 73,700 (less than that of a new North Rodney/Kaipara District) and without the regional functions of a Unitary Council currently has about 450 - 347 fulltime equivalents (FTEs).

Source: Northern Advocate – ‘Far North Exodus – 219 Staff In Three Years – Grievances Cost \$1.27 Million’ 10 September 2025 and Far North District Council 2023/24 Annual Report

- The Tasman District, with a population of 59,900 and which does have the regional functions of a Unitary Council has over 400 – 389 fulltime equivalents (FTES).

Source: Tasman District Council – ‘Why Work At Tasman District Council’ and Tasman District Council Annual Report 2024/25

- The Gisborne District, with a population of 52,700 and which does have the regional functions of a Unitary Council has 507 – 419 full time equivalents (FTEs).

Source: Gisborne District Council – ‘Council’ and Gisborne 2024/25 Annual Report

- The Marlborough District, with a population of 51,600 and which does have the regional functions of a Unitary Council has 419 - 344 full time equivalents (FTEs).

Source: Marlborough District Council Annual Report 2024/25 – Page 106

- Nelson, with a population of 50,880 and which does have the regional functions of a Unitary Council has 390 – 327 full time equivalents (FTEs). (Note – Nelson has only 52 km of coastline)

Source: Nelson City Council – ‘Careers’ and Nelson City Council 2023/24 Annual Report

- When the former Rodney District merged with Auckland in 2010 it did not have the regional functions of a Unitary Council, had a population of 98,000 and had 381 full time equivalents (FTEs).

Source: Rodney District Council – ‘2009/10 Annual Report’

The only other authority with unitary functions currently in New Zealand is the Chatham Islands.

The cost of staff vehicles (and of somewhere to park and store them overnight) would be additional.

Some staff (e.g. libraries staff and local building and health inspectors) and some staff vehicles may transfer from Auckland Council but for the most part the additional positions will be ‘new’ vacancies.

All of the then current Kaipara employees would transfer to the new Authority and some relocate from Dargaville and from Mangawhai to Warkworth.

The new Council could expect to have to pay some staff relocation costs and both Auckland Council and the Kaipara Council may experience some redundancies.

7.0A A NEW COUNCIL WOULD HAVE MORE THAN THREE TIMES AS MANY UNSEALED ROADS AS THE NORTH RODNEY AREA HAS

The new district would have about 1,121 km of sealed roads, 1,640 km of unsealed roads and 624 bridges:

TABLE

VERY APPROXIMATE LENGTH OF ROADS AND NUMBER OF BRIDGES

	Sealed (km)	Unsealed (km)	Total (km)	Bridges (No)
Kaipara*	471	1,140	1,611	354
North Rodney Est)	650	500	1,150	270
Total	1,121	1,640	2,761	624

Source* - Kaipara District Council – ‘*Kaipara Roads*’

For the reasons mentioned below these numbers are ‘a guesstimate’ but the key points to note are that Kaipara (with a total population of about half the North Rodney area) has a significantly greater length of roads to upgrade, maintain and renew than North Rodney does and less than 30% of its roads are sealed. Kaipara also has more bridges to upgrade, maintain, and renew than Northern Rodney does.

The figures can only be approximate because the actual lengths for North Rodney are not known. In *2010 the whole former Rodney District had 1,038 km of sealed roads; 688 km of unsealed roads; and 386 bridges. Deleting roads in the Hibiscus Coast, south of Puhoi, south of Helensville and in Wainui, Dairy Flat, Coatesville, Kumeu/Huapai and Riverhead these figures might reduce to something like 650 km sealed roads, 500 unsealed roads and 270 bridges (and those are the figures in the above table).

Source* - Rodney District Council – ‘*2009/10 Annual Report*’

An exercise would need to be carried out to determine what the exact length of the sealed and unsealed roads, and the number of bridges, in a new North Rodney/Kaipara district would be.

Management of the roading network would be by far the biggest function of any new new authority. In 2024/25 the Kaipara District Council spent \$40 million on its roads and footpaths:

	(\$000)
- Maintenance and Operations	17,393
- Capital Expenditure	
Additional Demand	767
Improved Level of Service	7,875
Renewals	14,081
- From Reserves	(1,820)
TOTAL	\$38,296

Source: Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report – Page 37

It isn't possible to say at this time what the expenditure on Northern Rodney Roads was.

It is noted however that the Auckland Council is funding additional expenditure on roads and footpaths and public transport and on travel demand management in the Rodney Local Board area (an area greater than North Rodney) by the levying of a transport targeted rate. The rate is levied against every separately used or inhabited part of every rating unit (SUIP). In 2026/27 the proposed charge is \$150 and is estimated to produce \$5.3 million (including GST)

Source: Auckland Council – 'Annual Plan 2026/27 – Supporting Information For Consultation Document' Page 152

The rate would probably produce about \$3.5 million if levied only in North Rodney

7.0B A North Rodney/Kaipara Council Is Likely Not To Be Able To Afford To Seal The Unsealed Roads Either At All Or At Least Not To The Same Extent As The Auckland Council Currently Is

It seems from the following newspaper article that Auckland Council is currently spending about \$10 million annually sealing its presently unsealed roads - approximately 80% of which are in Rodney.

'Auckland Council has almost doubled the budget for gravel road improvements over the next three years

'...The Governing Bodyhas agreed to spend \$10.1 million annually, or \$30.3 million over three years, on road sealing. The allocated \$30.3 million will deliver about 65km of sealing over the next three years.....In the current financial year, sections of Wharehine and Run Roads, west of Wellsford, are earmarked for maintenance seal, as well as Govan Wilson in Matakana. Several sections of Ahuroa Road will receive maintenance seal, while a section ...will get a seal extension including drainage and kerb and channelling. Roads listed for maintenance seal in the 2025/26 financial year include

Ocean View at Te Arai, Run, Old Woodcocks, Cowan Bay, Black Swamp, Pakiri and Ahuroa’.

Council’s Rural Advisory Panel chair, Andy Baker, commended Rodney Councillor Greg Sayers for his efforts to secure the funds. “He has fought long and hard for the Unsealed Road Improvement Programme (URIP),” Baker said....Sayers said that never in the history of the Supercity had such a large amount of money been won for sealing and upgrading rural roads.....’.

Source: Local Matters – ‘Rural Roads Get Budget Windfall’ – 27 November 2024

Rate funding of new sealing at this level in a North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority is unlikely to be able to be afforded. Also, a point often overlooked is that sealed roads have a finite life – once constructed they have to be resealed and rehabilitated at regular intervals - so the initial cost is not the only cost. Every additional kilometre of seal increases the annual amount that has to be allocated for asset renewals.

The Kaipara District Council, with its 1,100 km of unsealed roads, is not rate funding any seal extensions in its district at all.

‘Council no longer receives NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) subsidy for seal extensions and as a consequence new seal extension work is not generally implemented.

Options for seal extensions to occur are that roads are either sealed by developers as part of their development and at times by Council, when funded via development and/or financial contributions’.

Source: Kaipara District Council – ‘Kaipara Roads – Questions And Answers’

Maintenance of the unsealed roads and a perception that more should be being done to seal them has always been a problem in Rodney and in Auckland Council’s Draft Annual Plan for 2026/27 the Rodney Board says again:

‘We’ll also continue advocating strongly for better rural roads through the Unsealed Roads Improvement Programme, even though transport projects sit outside our decision-making.’

Source: Auckland Council – ‘Annual Plan 2026/27 – Supporting Information For Consultation Document’ – Guy Wishart, Chairperson, Rodney Local Board – Page 71

In advocating for a new North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority to be established the proponents need to clearly understand what the practical effect of having to manage three times the length of unsealed roads as North Rodney currently has might be.

8.0 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING OF REGIONAL PARKS

Within the North Rodney area there are ten Regional Parks.

- Mahurangi West 100 ha
- Mahurangi East 190 ha
- Scandretts 44.5ha
- Scotts Point 8 ha
- Tawharanui 588 ha
- Te Muri 444 ha
- Atiu Creek 863 ha
- Te Rau Puriri 247 ha
- Pakiri 78 ha
- Te Arai 454 ha

Notwithstanding that these parks (as their title implies) are used predominately by day trippers from the wider Auckland Region, and as such the policy has always been that their costs be spread across all ratepayers in the region, any proposal to ‘break away’ from the Auckland Region and create a new Unitary Council with regional powers means that all costs relating to the above ten will become the responsibility of the new North Rodney/Kaipara Council (but that that Council will not in future have to contribute to the other eighteen regional parks located elsewhere in the Auckland Region).

However because a disproportionate number of regional parks are located in Northern Rodney (i.e it comprises about 30%/35% of the region but has only 3% of the population) the net result will be an additional cost.

It is impossible to presently say ‘how much’ that additional cost might be.

The Northern Action Group (NAG) that has been advocating for a separate local authority since 2009 has suggested ‘*that the Regional Parks remain under Auckland Council’s care and control as ‘absentee owners’ with the Northern Council negotiating a grant in lieu of rates for the specific purpose of providing and maintaining suitable access roads’*

Source: Northern Action Group (NAG) – ‘A New Council’

This means:

- leaving ownership and management responsibilities for all of the parks, throughout the Auckland region (including those in North Rodney), with Auckland Council; and North Rodney not making any contribution at all towards their costs in future – instead:

- the Auckland Council also making an annual contribution to North Rodney towards the cost of the North Rodney/Kaipara Council maintaining the roads that lead to the ten regional parks in the North Rodney area.

The Auckland Council can be expected to vigorously oppose this idea, arguing:

*‘Any separate unitary authority must take with it all relevant assets and liabilities. It cannot expect to be given the responsibility for all **regional** functions in its area and then pick and choose – to have others pay the cost when to do so itself doesn’t suit.*

In any case:

..... the suggestion that the current simple arrangement where regional reserves are purchased at various places throughout the Auckland region and they and the roads leading to them are paid for by all the ratepayers of the region, should be replaced

.....by the Auckland Council and the new North Rodney/ Kaipara Council agreeing that Auckland Council shall continue to own, manage and fund regional reserves within a new North Rodney/Kaipara District and Rodney shall not pay anything towards their costs or towards the cost of other regional parks in the Auckland region, and in addition Auckland Council shall pay to North Rodney/Kaipara an annual contribution towards the cost of maintaining roads leading to regional parks in the North Rodney/Kaipara district.....

..... is a good example of why the simple status quo should be retained’.

The situation would be different if the proposed new authority was to be created as a territorial authority with the responsibility for only local functions, still within the Auckland region, but that is not what the proposal is.

‘Breaking up’ coordinated overall management of all of the regional parks would also not be a sensible thing to do.

Further, any proposed alteration to the way the regional parks are presently owned and managed is likely to be a sensitive issue:

‘Rodney’s...greatest achievement – the preservation of, and public access to, its exquisite coastline’

Source: ‘The Rock And The Sky – The Story Of Rodney County’ By H Mabbett 1977

9.0 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING OF WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER AND WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER CHARGES WILL INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY

Water and Wastewater charges would increase significantly.

- Prior to 2010 when Rodney merged with Auckland all water supply and wastewater costs were being paid by the (metered) users – with, because of the small number of users over which to spread the annual costs, comparatively high charges.
- Since 2010 the costs of all water supply and wastewater services have been charged uniformly across the whole of Auckland – which has substantially more than halved what Rodney consumers would have otherwise have had to pay.

‘.... before the formation of the Super City, residents in rural Rodney were paying \$3.50 for 1000 litres of water. That dropped to \$1.30 on July 1, 2011. Fifteen years on, they’re still paying less – \$2.296 for 1000 litres’

Source: New Zealand Herald – 25 October 2025 – Page A5 – Watercare Chief Financial Officer, Angela Neeson in *‘Auckland Rates Revenue Hits \$3 Billion’*

- If Northern Rodney is to secede from Auckland the cost of the balance of any water supply and wastewater debt that was transferred from Rodney to Auckland in 2010, plus the balance of all water supply and wastewater debt that Auckland Council has incurred on Northern Rodney water supply and wastewater services since 2010, will transfer back to the new North Rodney/Kaipara Council.

Based on the following statement by the Mayor of Auckland and a statement in the 2026/27 Draft Annual Plan that *Watercare ‘is progressing a \$38.3 million upgrade of the Wellsford Wastewater Treatment Plant’** if the work concerned has been debt funded (as is probable) this figure could be of the order of \$450 / \$500 million and in addition to the normal maintenance, operating and renewal costs would have to be paid by the Rodney Water Supply and Wastewater Users.

It pays to remember that (Auckland’s) Watercare has invested \$450 million to transform wastewater services in the Warkworth area, including the new Snell’s Beach wastewater treatment plant that will service Warkworth, and is designed for future population growth.

This investment was only possible because Warkworth sits within Auckland Council boundaries’.

Sources: Northern Advocate – ‘Auckland Mayor Wayne Brown Questions Kaipara- Northern Rodney Unitary Bid In Council Shakeup’ – 13 February 2026 and * Auckland Council –‘Annual Plan 2026/27 Consultation Document’ Page 5

- Note also, capital expenditure of this magnitude brings with it a significantly increased annual depreciation requirement.

The Mayor’s implication that this improvement work that Auckland Council has done would not have been able to have been afforded if the old Rodney District had still existed is probably true.

The benefits of having the highly regarded Watercare Services provide and manage all of the wastewater and water supply systems in Northern Rodney would also be lost. The new council would have to set up its own Water Supply, Wastewater and Stormwater Department (or Council Controlled Organisation - CCO).

The suggestion might be made that Watercare continue on a contracted basis but it is unlikely to be prepared to do that because that would be a more complicated and more expensive arrangement for achieving the same ends. It also wouldn’t in any way change the higher North Rodney financial requirement. In fact, because of the separate management, administrative and analytical work it would increase it.

The Northern Action Group does not appear to have adequately considered this matter.

The above comments apply only to the North Rodney part of the proposed merger. Insofar as Kaipara is concerned:

‘Whangarei, Kaipara and Far North District councils have agreed to establish a Northland-wide council-controlled organisation (CCO) to deliver drinking water and wastewater services from July 2027’

and such plan has been approved by the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA)?

Source: Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report Page 160

However...’the financial implications of this decision are unknown because details of the exact arrangements are still to be considered’

Source – Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report – Deloitte’s Audit Report – Page 10

If Kaipara District was to leave the Northland Region what would be the water supply and wastewater implications of that? – and any proposed change would have to be approved again by the DIA pursuant to the requirements of the Local Government (Water Services Preliminary Arrangements) Act 2024.

The DIA’s approval will also be required before any changes could be made to the current Auckland/Watercare arrangement.

Given the Government’s current efforts to streamline local government, and its ‘Local Water Done Well’ approach, the DIA’s consent (in both cases) is unlikely to be forthcoming.

Another suggestion that might be raised is that a Unitary Authority be established and Watercare continue to manage the systems as it is does now (with Kaipara added) as a Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) owned by the two Regional Councils, and the current method of spreading water supply and wastewater costs being maintained. In other words ‘the rest of Auckland water users continuing ‘to subsidise’ North Rodney water users as they are now (and Kaipara water users as well). The Government, the DIA and Auckland Council will never agree to that.

The Kaipara District Council spent \$12.2 million on its water supply and wastewater systems in 2024/25.

	(\$000)	(\$000)	(\$000)
	Water	Wastewater	Total
- Maintenance and Operations	2,851	6,955	9,806
- Capital Expenditure			
Additional Demand	53	251	304
Improved Level of Service	1,430	206	1,636
Renewals	49	434	483
Sub-total – Capital	1,532	891	2,423
- To Reserves	2,092	2,541	4,633
TOTAL	\$6,475	\$10,387	\$16,862

Source: Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report – Pages 49 and 60

In short Watercare Services is acknowledged as being probably New Zealand’s leader in the water supply and wastewater management business, the current arrangement works well (and very strongly in North Rodney’s favour), and no Government is likely to be prepared to change it.

It isn’t possible to say at this time what the annual expenditure on Northern Rodney’s Water Supply and Wastewater systems currently is.

10.0 ALL AUCKLAND COUNCIL DEBT THAT RELATES TO PAST EXPENDITURE IN NORTHERN RODNEY WILL TRANSFER TO THE NEW COUNCIL

In addition to the above the balance of all debt relating to other infrastructure expenditure in Northern Rodney (being what was transferred to Auckland Council in

2010 and what has been incurred by Auckland Council since) will transfer back to the proposed new council.

There will also be Kaipara's total debt – that was \$44 million in 2025 and is expected to increase to about \$80 million by 2027.

The whole of Rodney's debt when it transferred to Auckland in 2010 was *\$297 million. It isn't known how much of this related to the Northern part only and what the balance of it remaining now is.

Source: Rodney District Council Annual Report – 2009/2010

A more detailed exercise would need to be done to determine what a debt affordability benchmark for a North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority might be, and what the commencing and projected future total debt as measured against that benchmark is.

11.0 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUNDING OF AUCKLAND REGIONAL FACILITIES

As a part of the Auckland Region the previous Rodney Council contributed to the annual cost of Regional Facilities like the Auckland Museum, the Auckland Maritime Museum, the Zoo, and the Art Gallery (that prior to the Auckland local government reorganisation in 2010 were provided by Auckland City).

If a new Council is to be established creating North Rodney/Kaipara as a separate region the reverse of what the situation is relating to the Regional Parks will apply - the provision of those facilities would continue as a solely Auckland Council responsibility – meaning that North Rodney residents would no longer have to contribute to them.

Auckland Council can be expected to vigorously oppose that too and it will be difficult to argue that North Rodney residents don't use (or benefit from), and shouldn't have to contribute towards the cost of, the facilities concerned (and which they have been contributing to for at least the last 50/60 years).

Similar problems are likely to be experienced relating to any regional costs of this nature that the Northland Regional Council has - for instance the Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) 'Northland' that is equally and jointly owned by Northland Regional Council, Kaipara District Council, Far North District Council, and Whangarei District Council and whose principal purpose is development of the economy in Northland.

Source: Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report – Page 107 and Northland Ltd Annual Report.

12.0 THE NEW COUNCIL WOULD LIKELY HAVE TO PROVIDE MORE FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWALS THAN AUCKLAND COUNCIL CURRENTLY DOES.

One of the reasons that some are seeking to set up a new local authority is that they believe that Auckland Council concentrates too much on the central city area and is not allocating a fair share of the revenue generated in North Rodney back to the Northern

Rodney area – **‘disenfranchised and disaffected rural and coastal communitiesbeing treated as cash cows’*. A detailed analysis would be required before this could be proved but especially having regard to what Auckland Council (via Watercare) has spent on water supply and wastewater and ‘how much’ Northern ratepayers have contributed to that cost, the reverse may very well be true.

**Source:* The then Chairman of the Northern Action Group (NAG) Bill Townson in Stuff – ‘*No Auckland Secession – North Rodney and Waiheke’s Super-city Breakaway Proposal Declined*’ – 30 November 2017

A particular frustration though apparently relates to expenditure on the roads and bridges and the fact that work on them sometimes seems to not be being attended to when it should be and the reason for that is quite different to what many believe. It is not necessarily because the Auckland Council is not spending a fair share of its revenue in Rodney but because it is not collecting sufficient revenue from all of its ratepayers, across the region, in the first place to enable it to do so.

Every local authority – not necessarily every year but over time – should be spending on asset renewals an amount equal to the amount by which the assets are being depreciated (i.e. ‘used up’). If this doesn’t happen the offending Council will eventually find itself in trouble (as is currently the situation in Wellington). For example, water supply leaks and wastewater spills will become more and more common and their seriousness of greater magnitude, road condition will deteriorate and if not attended to the roads will eventually ‘break up’ and have to be reconstructed at a greater cost, buildings and other structures will become dilapidated and run down.

‘A council that is spending less on renewing its assets compared to the depreciation expense will, at some point in the future, need to spend more to ‘catch up’ its asset reinvestment’

‘Councils’ forecast renewals remain lower than forecast depreciation for the period of the long-term plans. This indicates that councils are still not reinvesting enough in their assets.’

Sources: New Zealand Controller and Auditor-General – ‘*Matters Arising from Our Audits of the 2018/28 Long-term Plans*’ February 2019 and ‘*Matters Arising From Our Audits of The 2021 – 2031 Long-term Plans*’ July 2022 Page 5

In Auckland’s case, a study in 2023* revealed that since 2010 the under-investment in infrastructure renewals at that time totalled **‘\$4.8 billion plus’** and based on the Council’s then planning would increase to **‘\$7.3 billion’** by 2028.

***Source:** Brian Sharplin – ‘*Auckland Council - Submission On The Council’s Annual Budget 2023/24 And On The Draft Reviewed Revenue And Financing Policy – The Sustainable Funding Of Asset Renewal And Replacement Expenditure*’ – 14 April 2023

If Kaipara’s 2024/25 results indicate what it is doing annually, it does not have this problem. In 2024/25 its property, plant and equipment had an estimated replacement

cost of \$1.596 million (of which \$1.130 million related to roads and footpaths) and depreciation and renewals were \$16.76 million and \$16.4 million respectively.

Source: Kaipara District Council Annual Report 2024/25 Pages 150, 152 and 170

Auckland Council acknowledges that it should be spending more on renewals. Prior to 2023 it said:

.....Fully funding depreciation from rates and current revenue would mean that on average, over the long run, we are not relying on borrowing to fund replacement expenditure. This represents a sustainable approach.....

.....On creation of the Auckland Council the legacy councils only funded, on average, 63 per cent of the qualifying depreciation.... The council adopted a policy of moving towards funding 100 per cent of qualifying depreciation by 2025. Given the impact of COVID – 19 on our operating revenues maintaining this target would present an unreasonable burden on ratepayers so we have extended this target by three years to 2028’

Source: Auckland Council – ‘Draft Reviewed Revenue and Financing Policy 2023/24’

But since its establishment in 2010 the Council has not been adhering to its own publicly stated, legislatively required, Revenue and Financing Policy and in 2023, despite its stated intentions the proportion of depreciation being funded was no better in 2023 than it was in 2010. The accumulated amount spent on renewals over the 12/13 years since 2010 was still only about 65% of the amount by which the assets had been depreciated (i.e. ‘used up’).

Source: Auckland Council Annual Reports 2010/11 – 2022/23 and Long-term Plans

Any study to determine more accurately the financial effect of a new local authority will need to identify what the annual depreciation sum is likely to be and provide for that amount to be funded (from rates and subsidies) and set aside for renewals. How the backlog is to be addressed would also need to be covered.

The possible/probable result is an additional ‘several million-dollar rate requirement’ annually but more work on asset renewals being able to be done – and as a consequence the roads and other assets being in a better condition.

Such a study cannot be carried out until a detailed list of all the infrastructure assets and their annual depreciation requirement in Northern Rodney, plus ‘how much’ Auckland Council is currently spending on renewals in the North Rodney area now, is known.

13.0 ALL COSTS RELATING TO A WIDE VARIETY OF WORKS AND SERVICES IN THE NORTHERN RODNEY AREA WOULD HAVE TO TRANSFER FROM AUCKLAND COUNCIL TO THE NEW COUNCIL

This includes but is not limited to roads, streets and bridges; local parks and reserves; regional parks, rubbish collections and disposal (including landfills' aftercare), water supply, wastewater and stormwater; wharves, boat ramps, management of the Kaipara and Mangawhai Harbours and the adjacent waters of the Hauraki Gulf, and foreshores' control (including the licensing of foreshore structures and erosion protection); community development, halls, community centres, libraries and museums; public conveniences, cemeteries, food safety and public health and safety (including noise control and the fencing of swimming pools); building control and health inspection, public transport, dogs' registration and dog pounds, agricultural pests destruction, noxious plants control, and by-laws' enforcement; civil defence/emergency management, natural hazards' management (including earthquake, flooding, erosion, subsidence and land slippage) and future resilience planning, rivers control and land drainage; district planning, land subdivision and development control; environmental management, natural waters' management (including the safety or otherwise of the water for swimming and siltation), economic development (including town centres' development and tourism promotion), regional development, pensioner housing, and so forth.

For a list of the regional functions pursuant to the Resource Management Act 1991 that a Unitary Council would have see Attachment 2.

A new authority would have well over 1,000 kms of coastline and in North Rodney there are more than 200 parks and reserves*.

**Source: Auckland Council – 'Rodney Local Parks Management Plan'*

- Some of the contracts for management and maintenance of these services may be for an extended period of time.
- Some of them will apply to a wider area (not only to matters within Northern Rodney) and will be difficult (or impossible) 'to break up' and may have to be allowed to continue, managed by Auckland Council with the costs being apportioned between the two.

An analysis may show that the amount spent on some of the services annually is more than the relevant revenue generated in the North Rodney area.

The proposal will also further complicate the management of coastal foreshores and waters because there would then be three regions instead of two bordering the east coast – including the Hauraki Gulf.

14.0 ALL AUCKLAND COUNCIL'S ASSETS AND LIABILITIES WILL NEED TO BE STUDIED AND (WHERE RELEVANT) APPORTIONED BETWEEN THE TWO COUNCILS

This is certain to be a very difficult and contentious matter and in some cases 'how' it is to be done and 'what' the debit or credit to Northern Rodney should be will not be able to be precisely identified and will need to be negotiated.

One area of difficulty that it can be predicted now is identifying the amount of development contributions that subdividers in the Northern Rodney area have been required to pay, 'how much' of this has been received, 'how much' is still owing and the arrangements that have been made for its collection, what the amounts that have been paid have been spent on (or are committed to be spent on) and their exact cost, and what the difference (the amount to be credited to Northern Rodney) is.

Another area that will be very difficult is being able to determine exactly what the loan debt applicable to only the North Rodney area is. Some (perhaps most) of the loans will not have been raised for a specific work in a specified area but for general capital costs (or perhaps for specified reasons or projects at a relatively high level) throughout the whole of Auckland. How these are to be apportioned will have to be agreed according to the circumstances in each case.

A North Rodney/Kaipara Council might (will) also have to accept a transfer of some of Auckland Council's contingent liabilities.

There are sure to be many disputes. A formal process for resolving them will have to be agreed.

15.0 ALL AUCKLAND COUNCIL FILE RECORDS RELATING TO THE NORTHERN RODNEY AREA WILL NEED TO BE TRANSFERRED TO THE NEW COUNCIL

This will not be an easy task either.

Building control and health inspection records will probably not be being maintained by Auckland Council in a way that easily identifies not only if the property concerned is in Rodney but if it is in that part of Rodney north or south of a line from just north of Muriwai to Waiwera.

Other records will relate to region-wide subjects (or to subjects that cover a wider area than just Rodney) and it will be impossible to split them. Few can be expected to relate to the North Rodney area alone. For instance while there will be some information of a specific nature all of the halls and cemeteries in North Rodney are likely to be being managed pursuant to policies and in a way that applies to all of Auckland Council's halls and cemeteries. Copies will have to be provided and both Councils have to manage those aspects that relate to their particular area.

16.0 UNTIL THEY ARE CHANGED THE CURRENT PROVISIONS OF THE AUCKLAND COUNCIL UNITARY PLAN AND THE KAIPARA DISTRICT PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE NEW COUNCIL

Managing and changing the Auckland Unitary Plan and Kaipara's District Plan will be a major exercise and creating an additional Council that would have to do this is contrary to the Government's objective of achieving a streamlined planning process.

The development of a new plan for a new North Rodney/Kaipara authority can be expected to take years.

Because of where it currently is in the planning review process transferring Northern Rodney issues out of the Auckland Unitary Plan at this time would be impossible. Any reorganisation scheme would probably have to provide for the current Unitary Plan to continue to apply to North Rodney and some aspects of it continue to be managed by Auckland Council until a final amended Unitary Plan becomes operative. After it becomes operative those provisions of it that relate to Northern Rodney would be managed by the new Council until amended by it. (There may be other options. This is a very complicated matter that requires careful consideration).

A new Kaipara District Plan has been under review for several years. A draft was issued in 2022 and a proposed plan issued for public consultation last year (2025). The Council is still to consider the 365 submissions that were received.

Source: Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report

If a new Council is not created Kaipara (with its own District Plan) will continue to be a part of the Northland region for planning purposes and Northern Rodney will continue to be a part of Auckland.

The Local Government Act 2002 requires the boundaries of regions to conform, as far as possible, to one or more water catchments. The proponents will need to show why they believe the proposed boundary with the Auckland Region is appropriate.

17.0 UNTIL THEY ARE CHANGED AUCKLAND COUNCIL'S BY LAWS WILL CONTINUE TO APPLY TO NORTHERN RODNEY AND THE KAIPARA COUNCIL'S BY-LAWS TO THE KAIPARA AREA.

If Kaipara has good up-to-date bylaws this process may be able to be short-circuited by updating and applying them to the North Rodney area as well.

18.0A THE NEW COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL AFFAIRS SHOULD BE MANAGED ON A 'DISTRICT-WIDE' BASIS – NOT IN SEPARATE FINANCIAL DIVISIONS – AND COMMON CHARGES BE LEVIED FOR ALL OF THE WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Whenever there are reorganisations of the type proposed here 'when it comes to the crunch' many find it difficult to accept the consequences of the change. They seek to have the former units continue to be managed within the new organisation as separate geographic and financial entities – often including the management of every separate water supply and wastewater system as a separate financial division, all with different water supply and wastewater charges (effectively to maintain the status quo).

That is an antiquated approach and it is important it be understood from the beginning that the proposal envisages that:

- the general rates and charges will be levied uniformly across the whole of the new entity: (and)
- all properties connected or capable of being connected to any water supply or wastewater system, anywhere in the district will pay the same charges; (and)

expenditure will be strictly according to clearly specified priorities determined on a region-wide basis, wherever and whatever that prioritised work might be.

Also, when Northern Rodney's current revenue is 'pooled' with Kaipara's and the above policy applied the effect of this will be that some ratepayers will pay more and some less (to produce the same amount of total revenue before any rate increase is imposed).

The rating incidence will also change between ratepayers within Northern Rodney when the rate requirement is calculated separately (i.e for a new Authority – not as a part of Auckland).

Another matter to be aware of is Auckland Council levies its rates on the basis of capital value. Kaipara's rates are levied on the land value but it is currently '*exploring the option of shifting its general rating method to the capital value*'.

Source: Kaipara District Council Annual Report 2024/25 – Page 21

A detailed financial exercise will be necessary to determine where and 'how much' the differences might be.

18.0B SOME POTENTIAL FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS THAT IT IS IMPORTANT BE UNDERSTOOD

In 2017 the Local Government Commission said one of the reasons why it declined the application to break Northern Rodney away from Auckland Council at that time was:

‘While there is a level of uncertainty in any modelling, the Commission’s view is that it would be likely to run at a significant deficit, even before transition costs are factored in, with a one-off rates rise in the region of 20 per cent’.

Source: Local Government Commission – ‘No Change For North Rodney, Waiheke’ – 30 November 2017

For the reasons mentioned earlier it can confidently be said that there would definitely be a one-off rates rise if the current proposal for a North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority was approved.

In the absence of a detailed analysis it is impossible to say ‘how much’ that rate rise would have to be but having regard to what Auckland Council has spent since 2017 (and is continuing to spend) on capital development of the Warkworth, Snells Beach and Wellsford wastewater systems it is certain to be a lot higher than was calculated by the Commission eight years ago – in 2017. For the water supply and wastewater charges it will be very significant – and for the rest of the rates the Local Government Commission’s figure of 20% (or even higher) seems reasonable - with perhaps less money being available for sealing the unsealed roads as well.

The financial effect of North Rodney:

- being such a spread-out district but on the other hand so close to metropolitan Auckland; (and of)
- not having a large commercial or industrial centre generating a good proportion of the district’s rate revenue; (and of)
- having such a long coastline (with Kaipara more than 1,000 kms); (and of)
- having less than 3% of the Auckland region’s population (ratepayers); (and of)
- being a holiday/day tripper’s destination;

should not be underestimated. (At the last census in 2023 76% of the dwellings at Omaha and 21% of the dwellings at Snells Beach were not occupied*). A merger with Kaipara (with about half the population, 1,600 km of roads (two thirds unsealed), and Mangawhai with 35% of its dwellings being vacant at census time) is likely to exacerbate the effect of these factors – not improve it.

Source: Stats NZ

Another reason for declining the request in 2017 was:

‘While smaller councils are likely to have lower unit costs for some functions, such as general corporate overheads, there are some areas where they could face significant diseconomies of scale, such as on many of the environmental regulation and management responsibilities of a unitary authority.’

In this case the water supply and wastewater activities are two examples of the very significant diseconomies of scale that will be encountered should a new authority be established – and the diseconomies now will be much greater than they were in 2017

when the Local Government Commission made that statement because of the large amount of capital that has been spent on the North Rodney water supply and wastewater systems since.

19.0 THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT IMPLICATIONS NEED TO BE CLARIFIED

The implications of taking North Rodney out of the current regionally planned and funded Auckland public transport system would need to be clarified. There are two issues here:

First: ‘How much’ are North Rodney Ratepayers paying towards the cost of Auckland’s public transport system and is the method by which that share is being charged reasonable?

This is especially relevant at this time because the 2026/27 proposed rate increase of 7.9% is mainly due to the \$235 million yearly cost to run and own the City Rail Link – CRL - (a new tunnel for trains underneath Auckland) the bulk of which is interest and depreciation costs for the Council’s share.

‘Auckland’s integrated transport system brings the benefits of CRL to the whole region, whether or not people have a local railway station. For people living on the North Shore or in the eastern suburbs, they can connect to trains via rapid and/or frequent buses’

Source: Auckland Council – ‘Annual Plan 2026/27 – Consultation Document’ Pages 7 and 12

Second: - The Northern Action Group (NAG) says the new Council will:

‘Provide an appropriate public transport system where it can be shown that it will be cost effective and supported by the user public.’

By cost effective it would need to be at least 75% user pays’

Source: Northern Action Group – ‘The New Council’

What does the Northern Action Group envisage regarding this?

20.0 THE LIBRARY SERVICE IMPLICATIONS NEED TO BE CLARIFIED

A new North Rodney/Kaipara Council would have libraries at Dargaville, Mangawhai, Paparoa, Maungatoroto, Kaiwaka, Snells Beach, Warkworth, Wellsford, Kumeu and Helensville. Auckland Council also has mobile library services and manages the overall library service regionally.

How such libraries would be funded and managed in a new Council needs to be clarified.

The Northern Action Group (NAG) says the Council would:

‘Provide a modern and appropriate library service by building on what we already have and also negotiate an ‘exchange’ service with neighbouring councils (including Auckland)’

Source: Northern Action Group (NAG) – *‘The New Council’*

The Auckland Council and the relevant Northland Council may not be prepared to do that if North Rodney and Kaipara are to be ‘taken out of’ their regions?

21.0 THE BENEFITS OF CREATING A NEW UNITARY AUTHORITY IN THE MANNER OUTLINED

The identified benefits of establishing a new North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority are:

21.1 Representation

Kaipara currently has eight councillors plus a Mayor.

Northern Rodney has one councillor on the ‘twenty- one person’ Auckland Council and nine members on the Rodney Local Board (that covers an area wider than just North Rodney).

If a new Unitary Council was established its membership could be expected to be something like an elected council of say nine – three from Kaipara, five from Rodney and a Mayor elected at large.

Note: In its earlier submissions promoting a separate council only for the North Rodney area (i.e not including Kaipara) the Northern Action Group (NAG) has said that if that was to happen it foresees an elected Council of six – five plus a Mayor. The above suggestion of nine has been developed from that.

Source: Northern Action Group Incorporated (NAG) – *‘The Council’*

Any final proposal for the establishment of a new North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority should also specify what the situation is to be regarding Maori representation and liaison – including whether or not there is to be a poll to determine the support or otherwise for a Maori Ward.

The Local Board would no longer have any influence in the North Rodney area and a consequential question that arises is:

‘From Auckland Council’s Local Boards’ point of view how would Kumeu/Huapai, Riverhead, and Coatesville and the area on the western side of the Motorway south of the motorway twin tunnels (including Milldale) be governed if approval for a new Unitary Council for North Rodney/Kaipara was received?’

Source: *Map Of The Suggested North Rodney Unitary Authority Boundaries As Published And Auckland Council – Map – ‘Subdivisions Of The Rodney Local Board’*

Auckland Council Ward boundaries would also have to be changed.

The new Council would be responsible for all of the council's actions – not like happens now where the Local Board is involved to only a very limited extent and has only very limited powers and the local Councillor has only one voice in twenty-one around the Council table.

On the other hand Kaipara would have less than half the number of councillors that it has now (and be in the minority around the Council table).

21.2 Transparency And Accountability

Presently it is impossible to say how much revenue Auckland collects from Northern Rodney, where it all comes from, what the total budget for its expenditure is (and how it is 'made up' and funded) and what the Council's actual performance against that budget was.

It is difficult to hold any Council accountable when this is the case.

But this is not a criticism of Auckland Council – it is all a matter of scale. A council with a population of 1.8 million, a total annual rate levy of more than \$3 billion and which is budgeting '*to invest \$3.9 billion on infrastructure and more than \$5.3 billion on day to day services in the coming year*'* cannot be expected to manage its affairs in a way that enables it to, upon request, report to a level that identifies separately its detailed revenue and expenditure in a particular part of its district where less than 3% of its population live.

*Source – Hibiscus Matters - Page 5 - 23 February 2026 and New Zealand Herald Page A5 25 October 2025 – '*Auckland Rates Revenue Hits \$3 Billion*'

However knowing and being able to readily provide this sort of information to a greater degree than is the case now (although still not to the extent described above) would be a distinct benefit of a new Unitary Authority.

Having said this, Auckland Council should be doing better in some areas than it is doing now. For instance its Draft Annual Plan says that the Rodney Local Board has been allocated \$10.5 million for capital expenditure in 2026/27 and then under the heading 'Key Projects Planned For 2026/27' doesn't mention any projects at all – just lists a number of very general statements. The only way a Council has to perform against that is to ensure it doesn't spend more than \$10.5 million (that figure having been set in the way that it has commonly called 'incremental budgeting'). The Plan should have listed every proposed project and its budget so stakeholders can constructively comment on what the Council is intending to do and then at the end of the year see whether or not what was proposed (in the adopted Annual Plan after considering stakeholders' comments) was achieved, within the planned timeline, to the intended standard and for not more than the approved budget (i.e. accountability).

Source: Auckland Council – *Annual Plan 2026/27 - Supporting information For Consultation Document – Rodney Local Board* – Pages 71 - 74

The Kaipara District Council’s 2024/25 Annual Report is a good, easy to read document against which its stakeholders can hold it to account (and is the sort of document that would be expected if a new North Rodney /Kaipara was established). It would however be enhanced if (notwithstanding what the regulations may require), in the Capital Projects lists it compared the actual results for the year against the Annual Plan budgets for the year instead of (or as well as) with the rather meaningless budgets in Year 1 of the Long-term Plan. (See for example the Roads and Footpaths Capital Projects List on Page 36).

Also, (again notwithstanding what the regulations may require) the essential services benchmark would be much more meaningful if it compared only ‘renewals capital expenditure’ on network services as a proportion of depreciation on network services (rather than ‘all capital expenditure’). The current way the result is calculated and reported doesn’t mean anything at all.

21.3 Consultation and Communications

Auckland Council has been very successful in persuading its customers to communicate with it via the web and it is generally quite good at responding to on-line complaints etc when they are made.

But a lot of the former human contact has been lost and its consultation practice is to largely pose a list of questions it has prepared itself (sometimes designed to support the action it is itself wanting to take) rather than encourage alternative suggestions and ideas - and when alternative suggestions are made the staff sometimes neutralize or quickly dismiss them. Some examples of where this has happened, including one instance where, a claimed staff error occurred and (notwithstanding that copies had been sent to the Mayor and several Councillors - and discussed with some of them beforehand) the comprehensive submission – that was critical of the Council - wasn’t presented to, and considered by, the Council at all*, can be provided).

***Source:** Brian Sharplin – *Auckland Council - Submission On The Council’s Annual Budget 2023/24 And On The Draft Reviewed Revenue And Financing Policy – The Sustainable Funding Of Asset Renewal And Replacement Expenditure* – 14 April 2023

A separate Northern Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority is certain to have a ‘more human face’.

21.4 District Planning

The Northern Action Group (NAG) believes that a Northern Rodney/Kaipara Council would listen more to the local people and pay more attention to their views. It sees the necessity for more attention to be paid to local plans that have been prepared over the years

‘rather than those plans be put aside in favour of a ‘one size fits all’ Unitary Plan as proposed by Auckland Council’.

Source: *‘The Northern Action Group Incorporated – A New Council’*

‘.....a combined Kaipara and north Rodney council would better be able to deal with preserving the areas’ predominantly rural-coastal essence in the face of the intensifying urbanisation expanding north from Auckland’.

Source: - Northern Advocate – Bill Foster, Chair, The Northern Action Group Incorporated – 9 February 2026

21.5 The Kaipara Harbour

The proposal would bring the whole of the Kaipara Harbour within the boundary of one region whereas at the moment it falls within two regions – Auckland and Northland.

22.0 CONCLUSION – For A Shorter Summary See The Executive Summary On Page 4

22.1 A New Unitary Council Will Have To Levy Higher Rates And User Charges Than Those That Are Being Paid Now (Sections 21.1 - and 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18A and 18B)

Although a new North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority:

- may give property owners who live in the North Rodney area (but not those who live in the Kaipara District) more say over what is done or is not done in ‘their’ area; (and)
- will result in a local council that can be expected to engage more meaningfully with the local populace than the Auckland Council does; (and)
- North Rodney stakeholders should more easily be able to hold it to account;

such a change will require the rates and charges to be higher than they are now.

22.2 It Is Not Possible To Say At This Stage ‘How Much’ Higher Those Rates And Charges Will Need To Be But They Will Have To Be Higher (Schedule 1 and Sections 4, 7B, 9, 10, 12, 14, 18A and 18B)

Until the information listed in Schedule 1 in Attachment ‘A’ is available and has been analysed it is impossible to say with any more accuracy what the financial implications are likely to be other than:

- it can confidently be predicted the water supply and wastewater charges will have to be significantly higher than they are now; (and)
- if the budget is prepared on the basis of fully funding depreciation (as any new Council should be doing too) while the property rates requirement may have to be higher more money will be available for renewals expenditure on

the roads, water supply, wastewater, and stormwater and other physical assets each year than is the case now.

22.3 There Are Significant Questions About How The Water Supply and Wastewater Systems Would Be Owned, Funded, Managed And Operated By A New Unitary Council And The Department of Internal Affairs' Approval For Any Desired Change Will Be Required (Section 9)

The proposal raises some very significant questions about how the various water supply and wastewater systems in both North Rodney and in Kaipara would be owned, funded, managed and operated should a new Unitary Authority be established – and any changes to how that is currently done in Auckland, and is proposed to be done in Northland, would require approval of the Department of Internal Affairs which, (given the Government's current approach to streamlining local government and to putting in place a much strengthened water supply and wastewater management regime), is unlikely to be forthcoming.

If such approval is not forthcoming the proposal for establishment of a new North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority will not be able to proceed.

22.4 There Are Also Questions Relating To The Future Ownership, Management and Funding Of Regional Parks, Regional Facilities, Public Transport And Libraries And Relating To The Management Of Coastal Foreshores And Waters, and District Planning (Sections 8, 11, 19, and 20)

Whether or not any new Council should be required to continue contributing towards the annual cost of Auckland Regional Facilities (like the Auckland Museum, the Auckland Zoo and the Auckland Art Gallery) is certain to be a contentious issue and the implications of taking ten regional parks, public transport, and North Rodney libraries out of the Auckland Region need to be clarified.

Similar issues may arise between the Kaipara Council and the Northland Regional Council (or the Whangarei Council).

There are also the practical implications of having three regions instead of two bordering the sea on the east coast – including the Hauraki Gulf.

Given the review process that is currently underway in Auckland, transferring the relevant provisions of Auckland Council's Unitary Plan to a new North Rodney/Kaipara Authority is likely to be a very complicated and messy process.

22.5 A New Headquarters Building Will Have To Be Built Or Otherwise Acquired In Warkworth And A New IT System Developed (Sections 4 and 5)

There will be the 'one off' (and subsequent annual cost) of:

- providing a say \$15/\$20 million new Council headquarters building (the design of such a building and its cost depending upon what the staff structure is to be and where the staff are to be stationed);
- developing and installing a new IT system; (and of)
- purchasing additional staff vehicles (and a place to park and store them).

Temporary office accommodation could be required for at least two years.

22.6 The New Council Could Be Expected To Have To Employ About 400/450 People. That is 230/280 More Than The Kaipara Council Employs Now (Section 6)

- An additional 230/280 employees are likely to be required (some of whom could be expected to transfer from Auckland Council) with a total annual salary bill of about \$40/\$45 million per year.

All of the then current Kaipara employees would transfer to the new Authority and some relocate from Dargaville and from Mangawhai to Warkworth.

The new Council may have to pay some staff relocation costs and both Auckland Council and the Kaipara Council may experience some redundancies.

New employment and remuneration arrangements (including the staff transfer arrangements and any redundancies) will have to be agreed with the relevant Union(s).

22.7 Before Any New Authority Is Established Three Critical Financial Management Principles Need To Be Agreed (Sections 10,12,18A and 18B)

All costings for the proposed new authority should be prepared on the basis that:

- apart from targeted rate revenue and water supply and wastewater revenue all revenue will be 'pooled' (and not managed in separate financial divisions); (and)
- and that an amount equal to the depreciation provision will be allocated for asset renewals annually.

Notwithstanding the forgoing targeted rates may be levied where particular works or services clearly benefit a particular area or category of ratepayers.

Water supply and wastewater charges will be levied in the same way that Watercare does now.

A more detailed exercise would need to be done to determine what a debt affordability benchmark for a North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority might be, and what the commencing and projected future total debt as measured against that benchmark is.

22.8 Other Matters

(a) Achieving Agreement About How The Authority's Finances Are Intended To Be Managed Is Important

If Kaipara's constituents object to the Council's finances being managed on a 'district-wide basis and argue that they should be managed in separate financial divisions the question that follows is: *'What would be the point of it - why join with Rodney at all?'*

Similarly, if Rodney's constituents don't want to pool Rodney's finances with Kaipara and want the two areas to be managed separately the question is the same: *'Why join with Kaipara at all?'*

(b) There Is Little Community Of Interest Between The Four Different Catchments That There Would Be In The Proposed New District (Section 3.0)

The desirability of creating a new local authority with no main commercial centre and with such a scattered number of different communities, some with a city focus on Auckland and some with a focus on Whangarei, and with little community of interest with each other, is questioned. (Section 3)

(c) The Regional Community Of Interest Of A Proposed New Council With Responsibility For Regional Functions Will Need To Be Proved

The detailed case for creating a third council with regional functions will need to be proved – including how it can be illustrated that Kaipara really does have a **regional** community of interest with North Rodney more than it does with Northland and that North Rodney really does have a **regional** community of interest with Kaipara more than it does with Auckland.

(d) The Northern Action Group’s And The Kaipara District Council’s Reasons For Seeking The Proposed Change Will Need To Be Explained

The proponents will need to be able to show that their claims that:

- (i) in preparation of its Unitary Plan Auckland Council has not sufficiently taken into account Northern Rodney’s past prepared local plans and has taken a ‘one size fits all’ approach; (and)
- (ii) that its ‘fears that North Rodney would be isolated, effectively disenfranchised, exploited and ignored within an urban centric Auckland Council have been realised’; (and)

Source: Northern Action Group Incorporated – About Us

- (iii) Overall, the combining of these districts would improve fiscal resilience through a broader ratepayer base without metropolitan cost structures; provide economies of scale for district-level services (water, roading, parks, reserves, planning, administration); and stronger planning capability... (and)

Source: Local Government Magazine 25 February 2026 – ‘A Logical District Merger’ by Bill Foster, Chairman, Northern Action Group (NAG)

- (iv) ‘Combining its 50,000 residents with Kaipara’s just under 30,000 would create a new entity of about 80,000 people.

North Rodney Action Group chair Bill Fostersaid that population was a good minimum size for a local government entity.

Source: RNZ ‘Auckland Mayor Slams Kaipara-Rodney Break-away Pitch’ 14 February 2026

can be substantiated.

Any-body charged with responsibility to consider the proposal is certain to require the proponents to explain in reasonable depth why they have the views that they do and that what they say is correct.

(e) Before The Proposal Proceeds Any Further There Are Some Important Matters That The Northern Rodney Stakeholders Need To Consider

Northern Rodney stakeholders need to ask themselves what they have to gain from joining with Kaipara – a local authority with half the population, presumably about half the number of ratepayers, and double the length of unsealed roads, and more bridges than Rodney has. (Section 7A). Furthermore, it is likely that a new North Rodney Council will not be able to afford to seal the unsealed roads

either at all or to the extent that the Auckland Council is currently doing. (Section 7B)

They also need to consider whether the setting up of a new authority in the manner proposed would necessarily result in them being more satisfied with the way the local works and services are funded and delivered than they are now. Kaipara is a small separate local authority close to its ratepayers and its residents' overall satisfaction last year (2024/25) was *45% - 60% for core services !

*** Source:** Kaipara District Council 2024/25 Annual Report and Key Research – *'Kaipara District Council – 2024/25 Residents' Survey – Final Report'* July 2025

Auckland Council's satisfaction result (for the region as a whole) was – 18% satisfied, 40% neutral (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) and 36% dissatisfied. When 'the neutrals' were pressed further to disclose their leanings 27% said satisfied, 20% said neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 48% said dissatisfied.

Source: Auckland Council – Verian – *'Citizen Insights Monitor Annual Report – April 2024 – March 2025 – Satisfaction With Auckland Council Performance – Rolling Quarters – Q2 24 to Q1 25'*.

Regarding the rates – all councils are right now considering what their rates for next year (2026/27) are going to have to be. At this stage in the process (February 2026) Auckland Council is proposing a 7.9% increase and Kaipara District Council an 8.9% increase, but these may change when their budgets are finalised.

Sources: Hibiscus Matters 23 February 2025 Page 5 and Local Matters *'Council Takes Scalpel To Budget In Bid To Curb Rates Rise'* – 24 February 2026

The charges for water supply and wastewater are additional. Watercare says that these will not increase by more than 7.2% for 2026/2027

Source: Auckland Council – *'Annual Plan 2026/27 – Consultation Document 2026/27'* Page 31

Auckland Council levies its general rate differentially – meaning that the rates charged on some properties are calculated to give a result that is higher or lower than those payable by others (based on where the land is situated and how it is used) – the higher the ratio the higher the rates. The key differentials are:

Property Category Differential Ratio

Urban Business	2.4051	
Urban Residential	1.0000	
Rural Business	2.1646	
Rural Residential	0.9000	Includes residential properties in North Rodney
Farm and Lifestyle	0.7380	

Source: Auckland Council – ‘Annual Plan 2026/2027 – Supporting Information For Consultation Document’
Page 145 (See pages 143 and 144 for the differential definitions)

22.9 It Seems From The Information Currently Available That Establishing A New North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Council Doesn’t Have Any Advantages For Kaipara At All

Kaipara District stakeholders should ask themselves what they have to gain from joining with Northern Rodney. This study hasn’t identified any real advantages for them at all. In fact with less than half the Councillors on a new body and the new Council’s headquarters in Warkworth instead of in Dargaville, they may find themselves in a worse situation than they are now. (A Dargaville Councillor will have to travel about 120 km each way to Council and Committee meetings).

Also, **if** Kaipara is actually 100% funding depreciation annually and the fact that at just \$44 million it has a comparatively low debt are two very ‘strong pluses’ and whatever arrangement that Council eventually enters into it should ensure it takes care to protect those two factors and not have the added cost of having to assist others whose past management in that particular area may not have been so responsible.

And another matter: If water supply and wastewater charges are to be levied like Watercare presently does, and as any new council should do – charged uniformly across all systems – Kaipara needs to ensure it fully understands what the impacts of that, for its water supply and wastewater users, will be.

But this conclusion is based on a comparison with Kaipara’s present situation as a separate local authority. The advantages and disadvantages may be different if it is to be absorbed into a new Northland body (as it seems may be likely). The situation would then have to be based on a comparison with that.

22.10 The Creation Of A New North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority Would Require Legislative Change

The establishment of a new local authority in the manner proposed would require a legislative change so the proponents will have to be able to convince

the Government that the benefits outweigh the status quo (for Rodney) and whatever may be otherwise decided in Northland (for Kaipara).

22.11 The Establishment Of A New North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority Would Require Auckland Council To Review The Local Board Implications Relating To The Land On The Western Side Of The Motorway South Of The Motorway Twin Tunnels (including Milldale), And (In The South) Kumeu/Huapai, Coatesville and Riverhead (21.1)

For the other main electoral ramifications see Section 21.1

22.12 The Creation Of A New North Rodney/Kaipara Unitary Authority Would Also Have Consequences For Auckland Council

Whenever a reorganisation of this type is proposed it is important that the likely consequences for the Authority that is to lose a part of its district be understood.

In this case there would be three main areas where Auckland Council would be affected:

(a) Less Revenue But Less Expenditure

In the absence of a detailed analysis it is impossible to say what the revenue and expenditure effect for Auckland Council as a result of ‘losing’ north Rodney might be. It is possible that it will be advantageous. For example - the annual revenue that Auckland Council is receiving from North Rodney water supply and wastewater users is much less than the annual operating and maintenance cost and the debt servicing costs it is incurring relating to the North Rodney water supply and wastewater systems.

(b) The Work Involved In Determining Exactly What The Financial And Other Effects Of Establishing A New Unitary Authority Would Be

It is always **HUGELY** more difficult to assess the financial implications of a proposed reorganisation when the merger involves only a part of a district (as this proposal does) rather than the merging of two or more existing authorities.

The work involved is ‘major’ and such a meaningful study is not possible without Auckland Council’s full cooperation and constructive input. Given the Mayor’s reaction to the proposal the Council is unlikely to be receptive.

(c) The Work Involved In Giving Effect To The Change

In its 2014 decision relating to the then application for a separate North Rodney authority the Local Government Commission said:

‘...substantial extra work would be required of Auckland Council if it had to alter work streams and planning processes to take account of a separate council in North Rodney’

Source: Local Government Commission – ‘Decision On North Rodney Application’ – 1 July 2014

This is most certainly true. Again, the work involved would be ‘major’ – and if Rodney’s amalgamation with a large part of the former Waitemata County in 1974 is anything to go by, will go on for years. In addition to it being a very costly exercise for North Rodney/Kaipara it will be a significant disruption and cost for Auckland Council too.

The effect for the Northland Regional Council needs further study but given it would be losing ‘a whole district’ that is currently separately constituted and managed (rather than is the case in Auckland – a part of the singularly constituted and managed Auckland Council), effecting such a change there would be much simpler and more straightforward. The Northland Regional Council’s main concerns are likely to be a loss a revenue for its regional functions and questions about the appropriateness of establishing another region between Northland and Auckland and it having to transfer all of its Kaipara District functions to that.

ATTACHMENT 1

SCHEDULE 1

INFORMATION REQUIRED TO ENABLE THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CREATING NORTH RODNEY AND THE KAIPARA DISTRICT AS A SEPARATE UNITARY AUTHORITY TO BE ASSESSED

- 1.0 'How much' revenue is currently being generated in the North Rodney area shown on the plan?
- 2.0 'Where is such revenue coming from and where is it going' - 'how' is it being spent (in detail for each activity) – including Council overheads?
- 3.0 'What' infrastructure assets would have to be transferred from Auckland to the new local authority?
- 4.0 'What' those assets' value is and 'what' the forecasted annual depreciation provision relating to them is?
- 5.0 'What' the total amount of debt that would be transferred from the Auckland Council is and 'what' its projected annual servicing cost is? (A breakdown by activity).
- 6.0 'What' the annual cost of maintaining etc the ten regional parks in the district is, what the annual cost of maintaining etc all the regional parks is, and how those costs are funded?
- 7.0 'How much' (if any) the new authority could be expected to have to contribute annually towards the cost of Auckland regional facilities?
- 8.0 'How much' North Rodney' is paying towards the cost of public transport (and an explanation of how that figure has been determined)?
- 9.0 'What' the annual cost of operating and maintaining each water supply and wastewater system (or all of the water supply and wastewater systems) in the North Rodney area is, and how many properties are connected (or able to be connected) to each system.
- 10.0 What the amount of revenue being received from all water supply and wastewater users in North Rodney is (by system and in total)?
- 11.0 What the respective length of the sealed and unsealed roads in North Rodney is and 'how much' of the targeted rate that is levied for transport in the Rodney Local Board area is derived from properties in North Rodney. Also, 'how much' of the maintenance expenditure for roads and footpaths relates to the sealed roads and 'how much' of it relates to the unsealed roads?

- 12.0 What the number of properties in, and the rateable value of, the North Rodney area (in each differential rating area) is.
- 13.0 A detailed reconciliation of the situation relating to development contributions in Northern Rodney – How much has been charged, where the contributions have been spent, and what the balance held (and owing) is.
- 14.0 A breakdown of the Rodney Local Board’s budget between North Rodney and the rest of the local board’s area.
- 15.0 Are there any other assets or liabilities (including contingent liabilities) that Auckland Council can foresee would have to be transferred?
- 16.0 ‘How’ Auckland Council would suggest the relevant responsibilities under Auckland’s Unitary Plan be transferred.

Compiling this information will be a very difficult task indeed – in fact in some areas like being able to state precisely where every dollar generated in North Rodney is going and ‘how much’ every water supply and wastewater system (or all of the water supply and wastewater systems in North Rodney) cost(s) – it will be impossible, and ‘estimates’ will have to be made. Reaching agreement on the formulae for determining those estimates is likely to be very difficult and, as mentioned earlier, a process for resolving disputes will be necessary.

A similar analysis of Kaipara Council’s finances will be needed but obtaining that data will be much easier – a fair proportion of it being able to be extracted from its Annual Plans and Annual Reports.

ATTACHMENT 2

THE REGIONAL FUNCTIONS OF A UNITARY AUTHORITY PURSUANT TO THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT 1991 SUMMARISED

Every regional council shall have the following functions

- (a) **The establishment, implementation, and review of objectives, policies, and methods to achieve integrated management of the natural and physical resources of the region:**
- (b) **The preparation of objectives and policies in relation to any actual or potential effects of the use, development, or protection of land which are of regional significance:**
- (ba) **The establishment, implementation, and review of objectives, policies, and methods to ensure that there is sufficient development capacity in relation to housing and business land to meet the expected demands of the region:**
- (c) **The control of the use of land for the purpose of—**
 - (i) soil conservation:
 - (ii) the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of water in water bodies and coastal water:
 - (v) the maintenance of the quantity of water in water bodies and coastal water:
 - (iiia) the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystems in water bodies and coastal water:
 - (vi) the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards:
- (ca) **The investigation of land for the purposes of identifying and monitoring contaminated land:**
- (d) **In respect of any coastal marine area in the region, the control (in conjunction with the Minister of Conservation) of—**
 - (i) land and associated natural and physical resources:
 - (ii) the occupation of space in, and the extraction of sand, shingle, shell, or other natural material from, the coastal marine area, to the extent that it is within the common marine and coastal area:
 - (iii) the taking, use, damming, and diversion of water:
 - (iv) discharges of contaminants into or onto land, air, or water and discharges of water into water:
 - (iva) the dumping and incineration of waste or other matter and the dumping of ships, aircraft, and offshore installations:
 - (v) any actual or potential effects of the use, development, or protection of land, including the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards:
 - (vi) the emission of noise and the mitigation of the effects of noise:
 - (vii) activities in relation to the surface of water:

- (e) **The control of the taking, use, damming, and diversion of water, and the control of the quantity, level, and flow of water in any water body, including—**
 - (i) the setting of any maximum or minimum levels or flows of water:
 - (ii) the control of the range, or rate of change, of levels or flows of water:
 - (iii) the control of the taking or use of geothermal energy:

- (f) **The control of discharges of contaminants into or onto land, air, or water and discharges of water into water:**
 - (fa) **If appropriate, the establishment of rules in a regional plan to allocate any of the following:**
 - (i) the taking or use of water (other than open coastal water):
 - (ii) the taking or use of heat or energy from water (other than open coastal water):
 - (iii) the taking or use of heat or energy from the material surrounding geothermal water:
 - (iv) the capacity of air or water to assimilate a discharge of a contaminant:
 - (fb) **If appropriate, and in conjunction with the Minister of Conservation,—**
 - (i) the establishment of rules in a regional coastal plan to allocate the taking or use of heat or energy from open coastal water:
 - (ii) the establishment of a rule in a regional coastal plan to allocate space in a coastal marine area under Part 7A:

- (g) **In relation to any bed of a water body, the control of the introduction or planting of any plant in, on, or under that land, for the purpose of—**
 - (i) soil conservation:
 - (ii) the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of water in that water body:
 - (iii) the maintenance of the quantity of water in that water body:
 - (iv) the avoidance or mitigation of natural hazards:

- (ga) **The establishment, implementation, and review of objectives, policies, and methods for maintaining indigenous biological diversity:**

- (gb) **The strategic integration of infrastructure with land use through objectives, policies, and methods:**

- (h) **Any other functions specified in the Act.**

Source: Section 30 Resource Management Act 1991

Note: The Resource Management Act 1991 is currently in the process of being repealed. When the replacement legislation is enacted the conclusions reached in this paper would need to be reviewed against that.