

The functional economy of greater Christchurch

Economic evidence on the labour market, retail trade and major institutions of the Christchurch city-region

Prepared for Christchurch City Council

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Definitions

Defined terms and abbreviations used in this report.

TERM	DEFINITION
Candidate area	One of the three study geographies this report compares on a consistent basis: Greater Christchurch (232 SA2s), Greater Christchurch south of the Waimakariri River (203 SA2s), and Canterbury (331 SA2s).
Catchment (labour-market catchment)	The share of a district's employed residents who work in Christchurch City. It measures how far the city's labour market reaches into the surrounding districts.
Correspondence principle	The principle, drawn from fiscal federalism, that a jurisdiction works best when its boundary corresponds to the area over which the costs and benefits of its decisions fall.
Fiscal equivalence	The principle that those who decide on, pay for and benefit from a local service should be broadly the same population.
Fiscal federalism	The branch of economics concerned with how responsibilities and finances are assigned across the different tiers of government.
Functional economy	The area that works as one economy (a single labour market and trading area) regardless of where administrative boundaries fall.
MTAGDP (Modelled Territorial Authority GDP)	MBIE's experimental, modelled estimate of GDP for each territorial authority, apportioned to the candidate areas in this report.

SA2 (Statistical Area 2)	Stats NZ's mid-level geographic unit. Each candidate area in this report is built from whole SA2 units on 2023 boundaries.
Self-containment	The share of an area's employed residents who work within that same area. A higher figure means more residents both live and work locally.
Town orientation	Of the residents of a town who commute outside it, the share who work in Christchurch City. It measures only those commuting out.

Executive summary

Canterbury is one of New Zealand's largest regional economies, with Christchurch City at its centre; about four-fifths of its people, jobs and output sit in Greater Christchurch, the focus of this brief.

1. On the available evidence, Greater Christchurch functions as one integrated economy with a single labour market and trading area, centred on Christchurch City.

The city's economic reach is strong across its inner surrounding towns and falls away sharply beyond them, so the area that works as one economy has a clear and measurable extent.

Christchurch City Council (CCC) commissioned this evidence base to help elected members respond to the Government's "Head Start" local government reform policy. Economics bears on that boundary question through how well an administrative boundary corresponds to the functional economy (the area that works as one labour market and trading area) so CCC asked us to set out how the city and the wider region work as a single economy: where people work, where they spend, and where the major facilities draw their users from. This evidence base reports what the evidence shows, without recommending any boundary or structure for local government institutions.

This memo provides economic evidence on the wider functional economy on the basis that it is relevant to at least two of the five criteria outlined in the *Head Start pathway — Simplifying Local Government*¹, New Zealand Government (Department of Internal Affairs), May 2026: economies of scale and local voice.

2. One economy, centred strongly in Christchurch City.

The surrounding towns send the clear majority of their out-of-town commuters to Christchurch City: Rolleston 81.0 per cent, Lincoln 81.3 per cent, Rangiora 78.6 per cent and Kaiapoi 83.4 per cent.²

Consumer spending crosses the boundaries both ways and on a large scale: about \$1,082m of card spend a year, \$916.2m from district residents into the city and \$165.5m from city residents into the districts. Spending runs predominantly toward the city, the normal pattern

¹ Head Start pathway — Simplifying Local Government, New Zealand Government (Department of Internal Affairs), May 2026. The pathway is voluntary; councils that do not opt in are subject to a compulsory backstop process after the 2028 local elections. The five assessment criteria are deliverability, support for the new planning system, simpler local governance, economies of scale, and maintaining local voice.

² Commuting figures are from the Stats NZ Census 2023 journey-to-work data.

of a central place and the towns around it, and the spending counterpart of the wages those residents earn by commuting in.³

3. Each district's workforce splits between home and the city.

Of Selwyn's and Waimakariri's employed residents, a little over half work within their own district (self-containment: Selwyn 55.0 per cent, Waimakariri 60.4 per cent) and most of the rest commute to Christchurch City (catchment: Selwyn 44.5 per cent, Waimakariri 38.2 per cent), with almost none working elsewhere. The city itself is 98.0 per cent self-contained, since for the city working locally and working in the city are the same thing. The pull drops away beyond these two districts: Hurunui 6.6 per cent, and negligible in Ashburton and Timaru, at the outer edge of the city's labour market.

4. Larger areas contain more of their commuting workforce.

The three candidate areas are all large: Greater Christchurch has an estimated 541,000 residents, 271,000 employees and GDP of \$41,549m, roughly a tenth of the country on each count. The larger the area, the more of its commuting it contains and the less its boundary cuts: about 4.1 per cent of Greater Christchurch's commuting journeys cross its boundary, compared with about 8.5 per cent for Greater Christchurch south of the Waimakariri River.

5. The region has important economic institutions that operate beyond district boundaries.

The area's major facilities sit across the current council boundaries. Inside the city are Lyttelton Port, Christchurch Airport, Christchurch Hospital and the University of Canterbury. Outside the city but inside Greater Christchurch are MidlandPort at Rolleston, Lincoln University, and Orion: the lines company running an integrated network across Christchurch City and Selwyn District, jointly owned by the city (89.275 per cent) and Selwyn District Council (10.725 per cent).

6. Faster-than-average growth, especially in Selwyn and (to a lesser extent) Waimakariri.

Greater Christchurch has grown faster than New Zealand on people, jobs and homes, and kept growing after 2020 when the larger metropolitan centres slowed. Selwyn and Waimakariri are among the fastest-growing parts of the country: Selwyn's population grew

³ Spending running toward the city is the normal pattern for a central place: a larger centre draws retail from the smaller towns around it, which offer less to draw city residents the other way. This is not a loss to the districts. No area runs a trade deficit with everyone. The net flow into the city is the spending side of the wages district residents earn by commuting in, together with the districts' own exports.

4.8 per cent a year over 2018 to 2025, and both districts have consented new homes far above the national rate for two decades, with Selwyn at about three times the national average. The growth is shared across all three councils but most pronounced in Selwyn and Waimakariri, and on Stats NZ projections that pattern is set to continue, with Selwyn expected to grow fastest over the next 25 years.

7. This is one component in a much broader set of considerations.

The evidence here describes one dimension only: the economic geography of people, work and spending. It is relevant to the boundary question but a functional economy can be governed in more than one way, and a fully informed decision has to weigh many other factors. Indeed, most anglosphere cities have many more local government units within a wider metropolitan area than in New Zealand.⁴ Some council functions share the people-flow geography mapped here while others do not. Freshwater, flood and catchment management follow river systems, and some functions need a regional or national scale, while other functions benefit from more localised knowledge.

⁴ The metropolitan areas of Melbourne, Sydney and Perth have 30 or more local government units; Adelaide has 17; Other relevant metros: London (33), Toronto (25), Montreal (82), Boston (101), Vancouver (21), Washington, DC (24).

1 Purpose, scope and approach

Christchurch City Council commissioned **Heuser|Whittington** to prepare an independent economic evidence base on how Greater Christchurch works as an economy, to inform the Council's consideration of local-government reorganisation under the Government's Head Start pathway. We were asked to set out the functional economy (how far the labour market extends, where trade flows, and where the major employers and institutions are) and to do so without recommending any particular outcome.

This memo sets out the available evidence on that by:

- defining a consistent set of geographic study areas
- providing evidence on the journey-to-work labour market
- mapping two-way retail trade
- setting out the major economic facilities, and
- drawing these strands together on a common geographic basis.

Heuser|Whittington takes no view, for or against, on a unitary authority, amalgamation, or any boundary change, and we recommend no particular candidate area. This memo is an independent evidence base rather than an argument for any particular area.

1.1 The relevance of economic geography to jurisdictional boundaries

This memo presents one strand of economic analysis: the functional economy of Greater Christchurch as measured by commuting, retail trade, growth, and the location of major economic institutions. It tests the degree to which the current boundaries, and the candidate alternatives, correspond to that functional economy. Integration measured through commuting and trade does not, on its own, settle the question of structural reform: other considerations can favour smaller or multiple jurisdictions even within a single functional economy.

The economics literature says that a jurisdiction works best when its boundary matches the area over which a function's costs and benefits fall, but that area differs from one function to the next.⁵ A labour market and a housing market span Greater Christchurch; a district plan, a local park or a community facility can serve a smaller community; freshwater, flood and

⁵ The principle that an administrative boundary works best when it corresponds to the area over which the costs and benefits of its decisions fall is known as the *correspondence principle* in fiscal federalism, or *fiscal equivalence* in the public-economics tradition. See Oates (1972); Olson (1969); Tiebout (1956).

catchment management follow river systems; and some specialist functions reach a regional or national scale. Applied consistently, the principle points to a set of boundaries matched to each function rather than a single jurisdiction drawn around the labour market.

A single authority can capture economies of scale and scope across functions, reduce duplication, and give one clear line of accountability for region-wide outcomes.

Multiple units of government with rating powers and separate balance sheets within a functional economy can be valuable by preserving choice and comparison between councils, keeping decision-makers close to distinct communities of interest, and guarding against the loss of local accountability that consolidation into a single authority can bring.

The decision-makers preparing the Head Start proposal will need to consider all of these factors.

The Head Start criteria are the standard against which the Government has signalled it will assess proposals. In our view they do not, on their own, capture all of the dimensions a defensible structural argument should address. Relevant criteria to assess reorganisation proposals include:⁶

- Fiscal equivalence and sources of funding
- Cross-boundary spillovers of costs and benefits
- Subsidiarity
- Economies of scale and scope for government functions
- Alignment of accountability for outcomes with communities of interest
- Importance of local variability in outcomes
- Costs of implementation
- Location of capability and information
- Natural geographic footprint of the function (catchments, networks, airsheds)
- Treaty settlements and existing co-governance arrangements

⁶ The relevant criteria draw on New Zealand Productivity Commission, *Towards Better Local Regulation* (Final Report, May 2013), chapter 6; Castalia, *Functions of Regional and Unitary Authorities in New Zealand: Report to Te Uru Kāhika* (October 2025); and Heuser|Whittington, *Interim Framework Note: Local Government Reform Toolkit*, report to Te Uru Kāhika (June 2026).

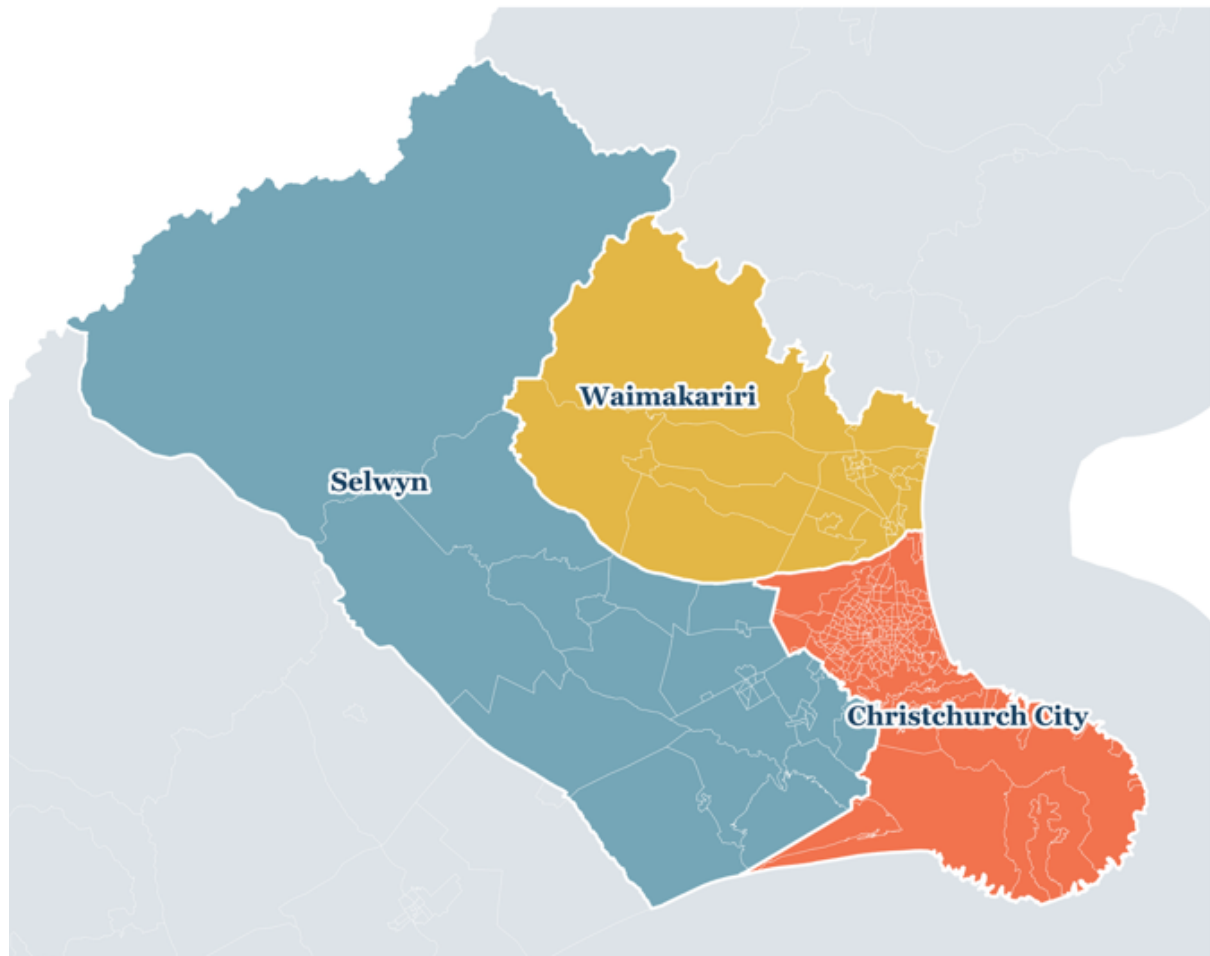
These criteria are best applied function by function, not to a council as a whole. Each council function has its own natural geography and/or community of interest and its own trade-offs: a function may sit best at a larger scale where that lowers cost or holds scarce capability together, at a smaller scale where local knowledge and accountability matter more, or shared across councils where its effects spill across boundaries. This memo identifies potential communities of interest on both sides: the commuting and trade flows point to a shared economic community, while the districts' self-containment above half, their different industry structures, and their distinct growth paths point to communities of interest that remain local. The same data supports more than one reading. Freshwater, flood and catchment management, for instance, follow river systems (and the Government has said Head Start proposals must keep catchments whole).

1.2 The candidate areas and the current council structure

Greater Christchurch is governed today by three territorial authorities: Christchurch City Council, Selwyn District Council and Waimakariri District Council, under one regional council, Environment Canterbury. This is illustrated in **Map 1** below.

MAP 1 STATUS QUO COUNCIL BOUNDARIES

Three district councils and a regional council



The two subregional candidate areas this memo looks at are identical except for whether they take in the area **north of the Waimakariri River**, the Waimakariri-district towns of **Rangiora, Kaiapoi and Woodend**.

The area we describe as **Greater Christchurch** includes them and is shown in **Map 2**; **Greater Christchurch south of the river** stops at the river and leaves them out and is shown in **Map 3**. **Canterbury** is the wider region we use for comparison.

MAP 2 GREATER CHRISTCHURCH

The city and surrounding towns, on both sides of the Waimakariri river



This report uses Greater Christchurch to mean the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan footprint, assembled from 232 Statistical Area 2 units on 2023 boundaries together with all of Banks Peninsula. The blue line is the Waimakariri River. The area takes in Christchurch City, the Selwyn towns of Rolleston, Lincoln, West Melton and Prebbleton, the port at Lyttelton and the peninsula out to Akaroa, and, north of the river, the Waimakariri-district towns of Kaiapoi, Rangiora and Woodend. It is home to about 541,000 residents, a little over a tenth of New Zealand.

MAP 3 GREATER CHRISTCHURCH SOUTH OF THE WAIMAKARIRI RIVER

The same area, with the Waimakariri-district towns north of the river removed



Greater Christchurch south of the Waimakariri River is the same area with one change: the boundary stops at the river. The Waimakariri-district towns north of the river (Kaiapoi, Rangiora, Woodend and Pegasus) fall outside it, which removes 29 of the 232 Statistical Area 2 units, and about 53,000 residents.

2 Canterbury's economy and the role of Greater Christchurch

Canterbury is one of New Zealand's largest regional economies and its second-most-populous region, with about an eighth of the country's people, jobs and output. The Canterbury plains grow, on official production figures, around 80 per cent of New Zealand's wheat and about two-thirds of its barley, alongside major dairy and sheep-and-beef farming and the food processing that goes with them. Christchurch City, at the centre, is the region's services, logistics and processing hub.

Canterbury's other main urban centres lie outside Greater Christchurch: Timaru, the main centre of South Canterbury, and Ashburton on the mid-plains. The economy is heavily concentrated. About four-fifths of Canterbury's people, jobs and output sit in Greater Christchurch, and Christchurch City alone holds three-fifths of the region's population. The analysis in this report focuses on Greater Christchurch because that is where the regional economy concentrates: the wider region's primary production feeds the city's processing and export, and the city's labour market reaches out into the districts around it. The rest of this section sets out how that core works as a single economy.

Two of the clearest measures of whether an area works as one economy are:

- where people work
- where people spend

On both of these Greater Christchurch points inward to Christchurch City: commuting and retail trade run toward the city, and its labour-market catchment is strong across the inner surrounding towns before falling away at a clear outer edge.

BOX: READING THE COMMUTING MEASURES

The commuting figures in this report answer two separate questions.

1. Where do an area's residents work?

Each employed resident either works locally or commutes out. The share who work locally is the area's self-containment; the share who commute into Christchurch City is the city's catchment of that area. For Christchurch City these are one and the same figure (98.0%), because the city is its own area. For a surrounding district they are two parts of one whole: of Selwyn's employed residents, 55.0% work in Selwyn and 44.5% in Christchurch City, with almost none working elsewhere.

2. Who fills an area's jobs?

This question turns to the jobs located in an area and asks how many are held by people who live outside it. Because it counts jobs rather than residents, it is a different measure from self-containment above.

2.1 Economic integration: retail trade and commuting

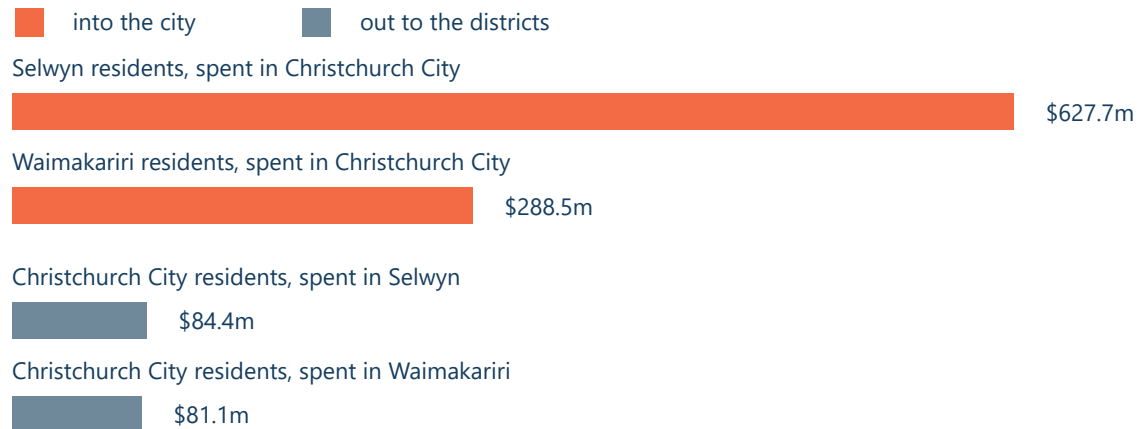
Greater Christchurch is strongly economically integrated: its commuting and its retail trade both point inward to Christchurch City.

Retail card spending in **Figure 1** below shows large flows running in both directions across the council boundaries of about \$1,082m a year in total. District residents spent \$916.2m in Christchurch City, while city residents spent \$165.5m in Selwyn and Waimakariri in the year to June 2025.⁷ That predominance toward the city is the expected pattern of a central place and the smaller centres around it.

⁷ These are electronic card spend only and exclude cash and most online spending, so the dollar levels understate total consumer spending.

FIGURE 1 TWO-WAY RETAIL TRADE BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE DISTRICTS

Card spending crosses the boundary both ways



Source: Marketview (supplied via Christchurch City Council); card spend, year to June 2025.

Note: electronic card spend only (excludes cash and most online).

The surrounding towns send the clear majority of their out-of-town commuters to Christchurch City. The four headline towns are shown in **Figure 2** below.

FIGURE 2 WHERE THE SURROUNDING TOWNS' COMMUTERS WORK

Share of each town's out-of-town commuters working in Christchurch City



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2023 journey-to-work.

Note: town orientation is, of residents who commute outside their own town, the share working in Christchurch City; excludes work-from-home.

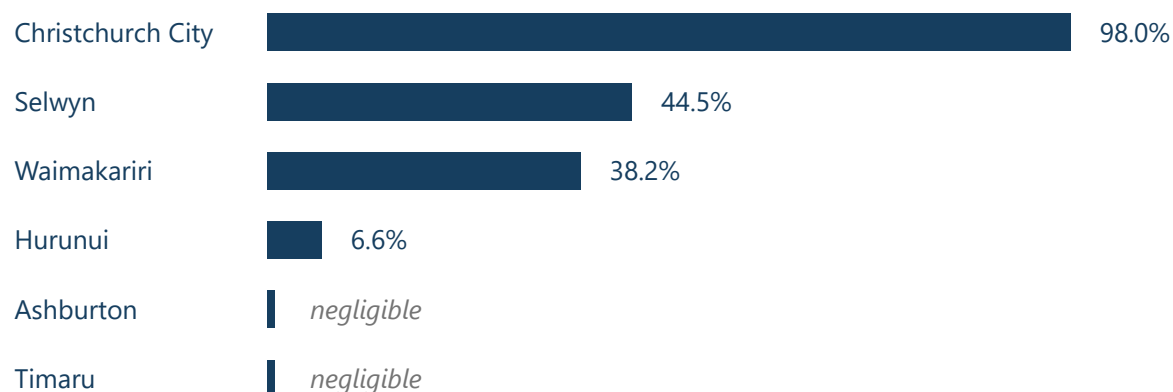
Collectively, these data describe a single integrated economy in which the city is the centre of gravity for both work and consumption.

2.2 The geographical size of the Christchurch labour market

The size of the Christchurch labour market is a matter of degree: Christchurch City's labour-market catchment falls off sharply with distance and reaches a clear outer edge.

FIGURE 3 SHARE OF EACH DISTRICT'S EMPLOYED RESIDENTS WORKING IN CHRISTCHURCH CITY

The Christchurch labour-market catchment declines with distance



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2023 journey-to-work.

Note: bars show the share of each district's employed residents who work in Christchurch City.

Christchurch City itself sits at 98.0 per cent (i.e., 98 per cent of Christchurch workers work in Christchurch). Its two surrounding districts sit well below: Selwyn at 44.5 per cent and Waimakariri at 38.2 per cent.

This catchment is the share working in Christchurch City, which is different from self-containment (the share working locally). For the outer districts the two diverge sharply: Ashburton and Timaru send almost no one to the city and are themselves highly self-contained, with around 97 and 99 per cent of their residents working locally. The integrated labour market therefore has a definite outer edge: beyond Selwyn and Waimakariri the wider region resolves into its own largely self-contained economies, Timaru chief among them. It is one reason the evidence points to Greater Christchurch specifically, rather than Canterbury as a whole, as the area that works as a single economy.

This catchment has risen over time. Between the 2018 and 2023 censuses the share of each surrounding district's employed residents working in Christchurch City rose, with Selwyn increasing from 39.1 to 44.5 per cent and Waimakariri from 32.7 to 38.2 per cent, even as both districts grew quickly. Their self-containment fell over the same period, and this is not a work-from-home effect: the work-from-home share held roughly flat in both. As Rolleston,

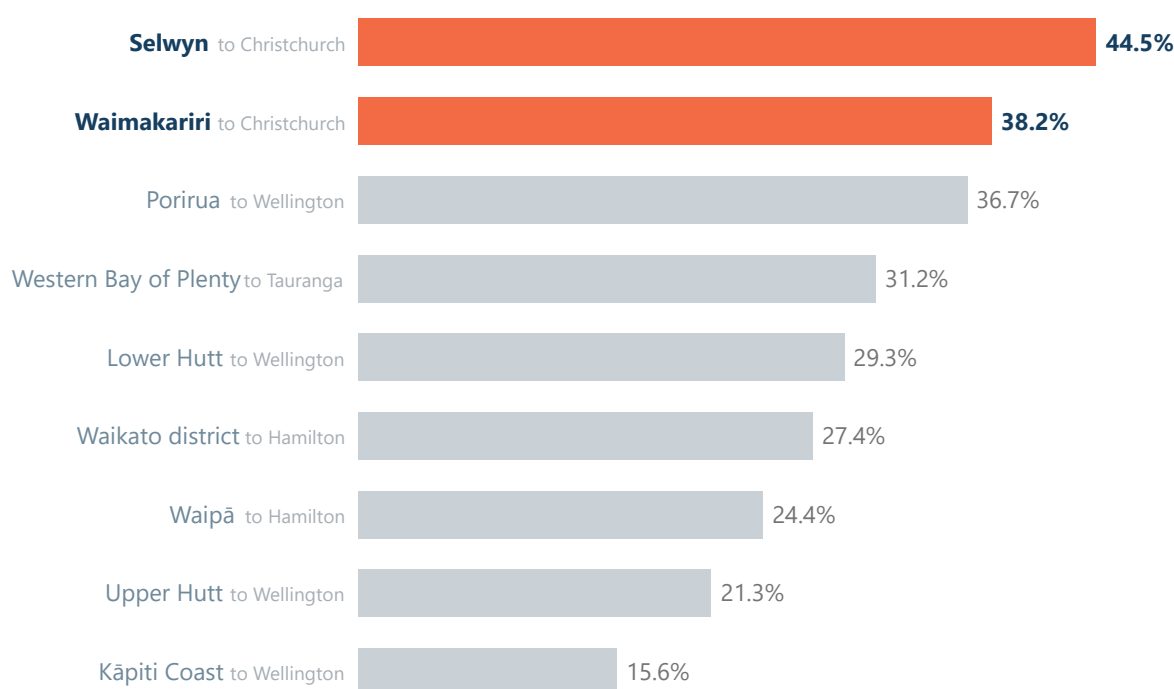
Rangiora and Kaiapoi have grown, they have become more tied to the city, not less, and the reverse flow grew alongside it, with more city residents working in the towns. The integration has deepened in both directions.

2.3 The functional economy spans the council boundaries unevenly

Christchurch City contains almost all of its own workforce while the surrounding districts work substantially across the boundary, the larger candidate areas draw less of their workforce from outside, and the major institutions already operate across the council lines.

Figure 4 below compares the degree to which Selwyn and Waimakariri residents work in the core city compared to other surrounding districts around New Zealand. It shows that Selwyn and Waimakariri are more strongly integrated to the core city than comparable districts.

FIGURE 4 COMMUTER ORIENTATION OF SURROUNDING DISTRICTS, BY NEW ZEALAND CITY-REGION



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2023 journey-to-work; Stats NZ Statistical Area 2 to Territorial Authority 2023 concordance.

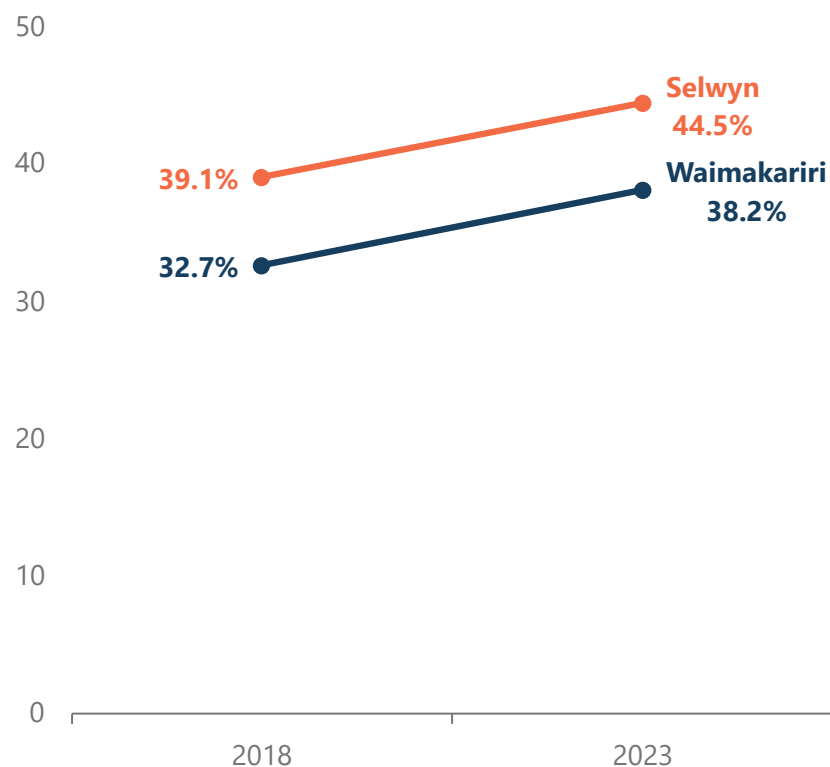
Note: each bar is the share of the district's employed residents (work-from-home counted in their own area) whose workplace is the core city.

The share of the workforce commuting into Christchurch from Selwyn and Waimakariri has increased over time, as shown in **Figure 5** below.

FIGURE 5 COMMUTING INTO CHRISTCHURCH

Commuting into Christchurch from Selwyn and Waimakariri has grown

Share of workers resident in Selwyn and Waimakariri commuting into Christchurch



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2018 and 2023 journey-to-work.

Note: all-employed basis; work-from-home counted at home.

2.4 Council boundaries and self-containment

Focussing on where residents travel to work, Christchurch City is almost fully self-contained, while Selwyn and Waimakariri each retain only a little over half of their resident workforce, as shown in **Figure 6** below.

FIGURE 6 SHARE OF EACH COUNCIL'S EMPLOYED RESIDENTS WHO WORK WITHIN THAT COUNCIL BOUNDARY

Waimakariri (60.4%) is more self-contained than Selwyn (55.0%)



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2023 journey-to-work.

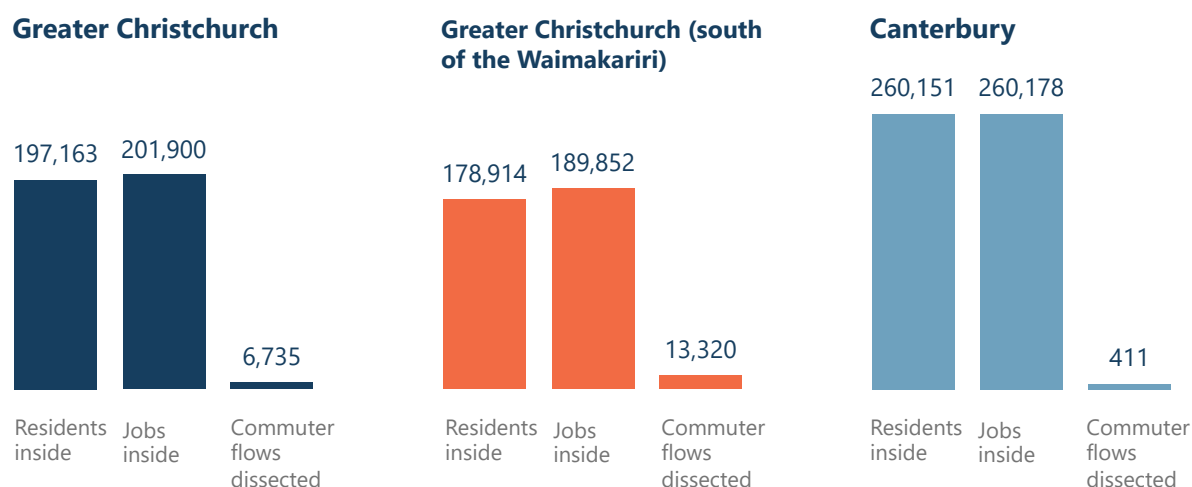
Note: self-containment counts every employed resident, with those who work from home counted in their own council; on this basis the city's 98.0% matches its labour-market catchment in Figure 3.

Self-containment is a different measure from the reach of the Christchurch labour market reported in section 2.2. Christchurch City's labour-market catchment is the share of each district's employed residents who work in Christchurch City itself: 44.5 per cent for Selwyn and 38.2 per cent for Waimakariri. Taken together, a large part of each surrounding district's workforce is employed across the boundary in the city, while a smaller part works within its own district.

2.5 Containment and cross-boundary flows by candidate area

For each candidate area, the charts below show the population and jobs each candidate area contains (**Figure 7**), and how far its labour market reaches across its boundary (**Figure 8**).

FIGURE 7 EMPLOYED RESIDENTS AND JOBS IN EACH AREA
A border south of the Waimakariri River bisects the most commuter flows

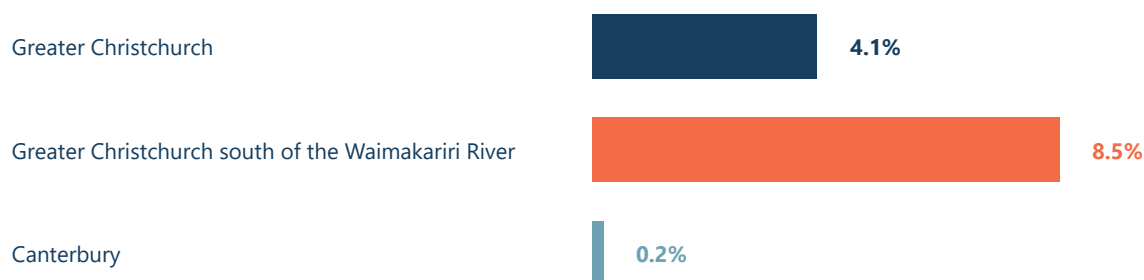


Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2023 journey-to-work.

Note: "residents inside" and "jobs inside" include people who work from home; "commuter flows dissected" counts commuting journeys only.

In per cent terms the bisection of commuter flows at the Waimakariri River is the most material, as shown by **Figure 8**.⁸

FIGURE 8 SHARE OF COMMUTING THAT EACH BOUNDARY CUTS
Over 8.5% of commuter flows are bisected by a border south of the Waimakariri River



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, Census 2023 journey-to-work.

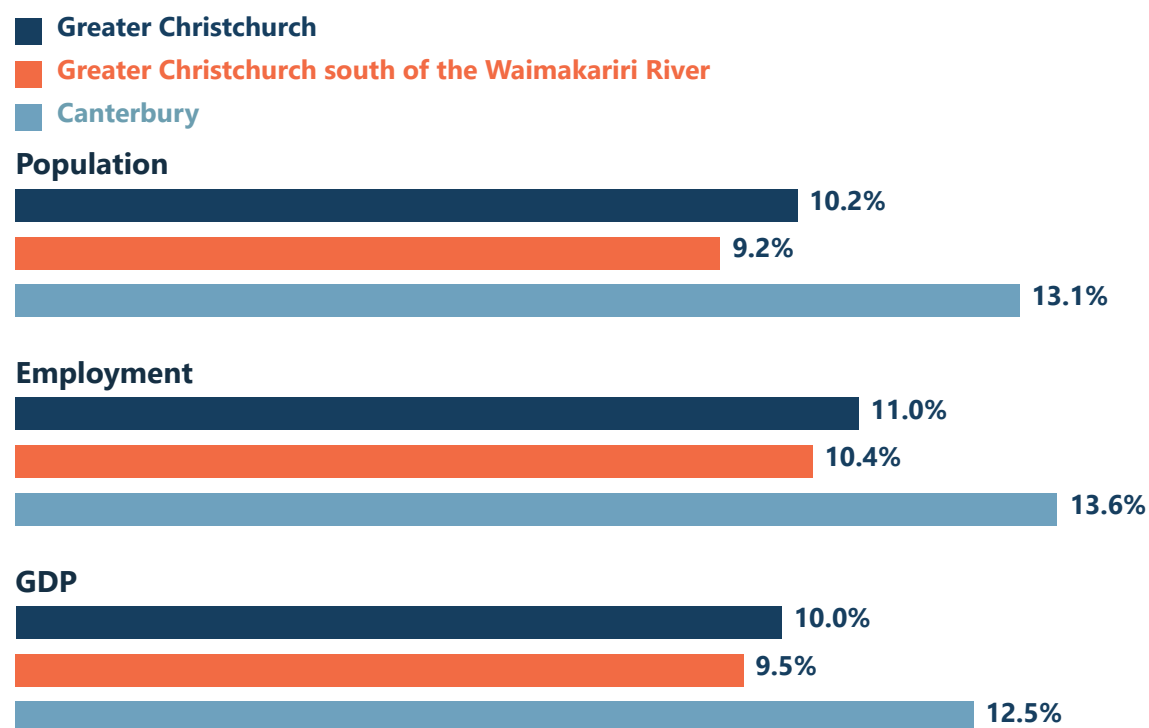
⁸ Figure 8 expresses each area's cross-boundary commuter flows (the third bar in Figure 7) as a share of the jobs inside that are filled by commuting (i.e., excluding people who work from home). It cannot be read directly off Figure 7, whose "jobs inside" bar includes home-based workers: for Greater Christchurch, 6,735 cross-boundary flows out of about 164,000 commuting jobs is 4.1 per cent

Greater Christchurch has an estimated 541,000 residents, 271,000 employees, and GDP of \$41,549m.⁹ Greater Christchurch south of the Waimakariri River has 488,000 residents, 255,000 employees, and GDP of \$39,513m. Canterbury has 698,000 residents, 333,000 employees, and GDP of \$51,675m.

Greater Christchurch is roughly a tenth of the country on each of population, employees, and GDP.

GDP per capita is near-identical across the four: Greater Christchurch \$79,340, the area south of the river \$83,673, Canterbury \$76,395, and New Zealand \$79,797.

FIGURE 9 EACH CANDIDATE AREA AS A SHARE OF NEW ZEALAND
Both of the two Christchurch-centred candidate areas are dominant economic and population areas of Canterbury



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, subnational population estimates (provisional), 30 June 2025; Stats NZ, business demographic statistics, February 2025; MBIE, Modelled Territorial Authority GDP (MTAGDP), year ended March 2024.

Note: New Zealand = 100%; MTAGDP is modelled and apportioned (nominal); underlying national totals: population 5,324,700; employees 2,450,600; GDP \$414,946m.

⁹ This GDP estimate and other subregional estimates use MBIE's experimental, modelled, nominal territorial-authority GDP, apportioned to Greater Christchurch and the area south of the river by each district's in-area share of workplace employment.

2.6 Industry structure

The city and its districts specialise in different things. Christchurch City is a service economy: about 70 per cent of its jobs are in services (health, retail, professional services and education) and only about 1 per cent in agriculture.

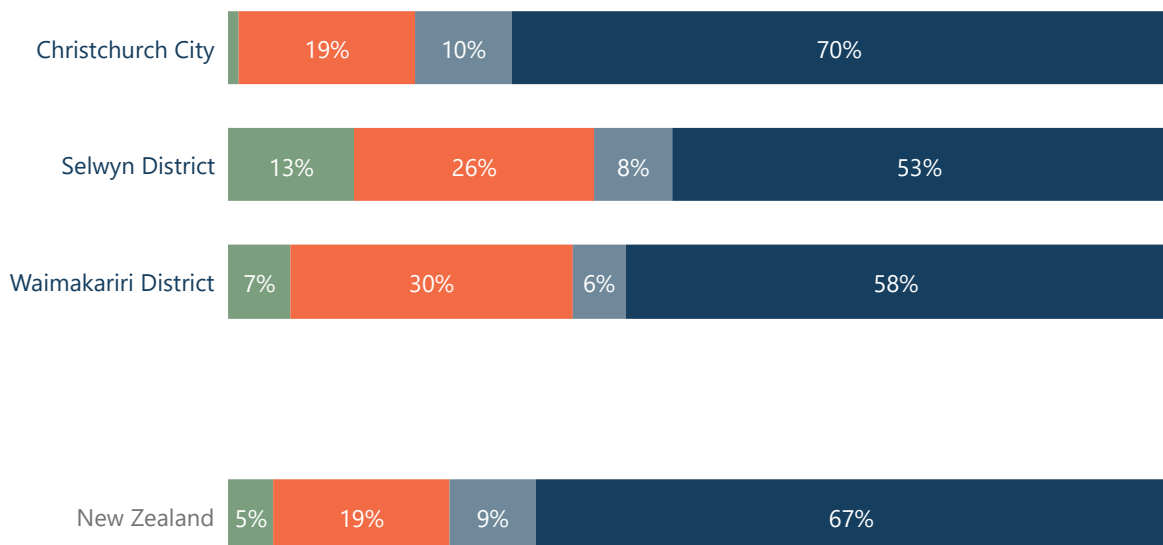
The surrounding districts are weighted toward producing and processing goods. In Selwyn, agriculture accounts for about 13 per cent of employment and manufacturing and construction a further quarter; in Waimakariri, manufacturing and construction together come to close to a third. The structure of each area and compared to New Zealand is shown below in **Figure 10**.

FIGURE 10 ECONOMIC STRUCTURES OF EACH AREA

Christchurch City is a service economy while the districts are more concentrated in production and processing

Employment shares

■ Primary ■ Manufacturing and construction ■ Wholesale and transport ■ Services



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ Business Demography. Share of employment by ANZSIC industry group, 2025. Manufacturing & construction = ANZSIC divisions B–E; wholesale, transport & logistics = F and I; services = G–S. Employee counts can understate farming due to owner-operation.

Read with the commuting and retail evidence, the industry structure tells the same story from a third angle: Greater Christchurch is one economy whose parts specialise and depend on each other across the council boundaries.

One dimension of that interdependence does not show up in the commuting or spending flows: the movement of value along the region's supply chains. At a high level, produce grown in the districts is processed and manufactured in the city and freighted out through Lyttelton, so the districts' primary production and the city's processing, logistics and services are links in one chain. Official statistics do not trace this value-add between areas at the sub-regional scale so we note it as a real further dimension of the region's economic integration rather than quantify it here.¹⁰

2.7 Major economic institutions and their location

The area's major economic institutions already sit across the current council boundaries, as shown in **Table 1** below.

¹⁰ Stats NZ publishes input-output flows but not at a subnational level.

TABLE 1 MAJOR ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE REGION

INSTITUTION	LOCATION (DISTRICT)	INSIDE CANDIDATE AREA?	ROLE /SCALE
Lyttelton Port	Lyttelton, Christchurch City	Yes	Hub for South Island imports - handles 79% of all South Island imports; 431,556 TEU (FY2025)
MidlandPort (inland port, Rolleston)	Rolleston, Selwyn District	Yes - outside Christchurch City	Inland rail freight gateway for Canterbury importers and exporters; 27-hectare site, direct rail to Lyttelton (MidlandPort-specific volumes not published)
Lincoln University	Lincoln, Selwyn District	Yes - outside Christchurch City	New Zealand's only specialist land-based university; 5,484 students / 3,744 EFTS (2024)
Christchurch Hospital	Christchurch Central City	Yes	Largest tertiary, teaching and research hospital in the South Island; 836 beds; Canterbury region serves 600,000+ people
Christchurch Airport	Harewood, Christchurch City	Yes	South Island gateway; campus is the South Island's largest employment hub (250+ businesses, 7,000+ employed); 6,395,158 passengers (FY2025)
University of Canterbury	Ilam, Christchurch City	Yes	Growing draw of out-of-region school leavers; 27,121 students / 19,396 EFTS (2025)
Orion lines network	Christchurch City + Selwyn District + Banks Peninsula (bounded north by the Waimakariri River)	Yes (partly) - crosses the city/Selwyn boundary	Electricity distribution across the city and Selwyn, bounded north by the Waimakariri River; 229,981 connections (FY2025); jointly owned CCHL 89.275% + Selwyn District Council 10.725%

Source: facility annual reports (Lyttelton Port FY2025, Christchurch Airport FY2025, University of Canterbury 2025, Lincoln University 2024, Orion Group 2025); Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora (accessed 12 June 2026).

Note: 'inside the candidate area' = inside Greater Christchurch south of the Waimakariri River (Greater Christchurch excluding Waimakariri).

Across these institutions, the picture is of facilities whose working catchments are drawn at a regional or South Island scale rather than at the scale of any single district: each serves users, freight or students from well beyond the council in which it physically sits, so the current council lines fall inside the area each one already operates across.

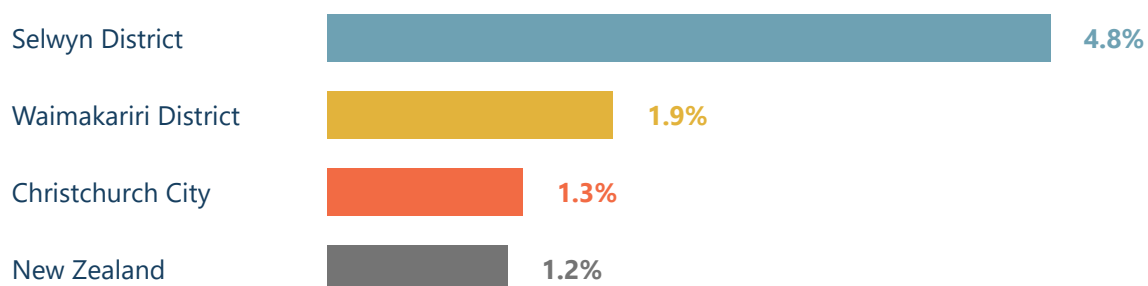
3 Growth relative to New Zealand

The Greater Christchurch region has grown faster than New Zealand on people, jobs and homes, and unlike the larger metropolitan centres it kept growing after 2020. The growth is shared across all three councils but as seen in **Figure 11** particularly marked in Selwyn and Waimakariri, which have been among the fastest-growing parts of the country.

FIGURE 11 GROWTH COMPARED AGAINST NEW ZEALAND

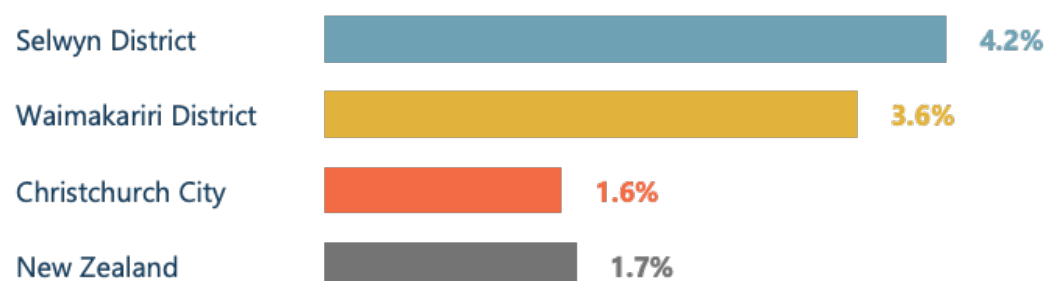
All council areas have had population growth faster than New Zealand

Population growth (per cent per year, 2018–2025)



All candidate areas except for Christchurch City have had employment growth faster than New Zealand

Employment growth (per cent per year, 2000–2025)



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, subnational population estimates (provisional), 30 June 2025; Stats NZ, business demographic statistics, February 2025.

Note: population growth 30 June 2018 to 2025; employment growth (employee count) 2000 to 2025.

The resident population of Selwyn District grew 4.8 per cent a year over the seven years to 2025, Waimakariri District 1.9 per cent and Christchurch City 1.3 per cent, against 1.2 per cent nationally. Selwyn added more than a third to its population in those seven years.

On jobs, the same order holds over a longer run. Employment in Greater Christchurch grew about 1.9 per cent a year across the 25 years to 2025, against 1.7 per cent nationally, with Selwyn (4.2 per cent a year) and Waimakariri (3.6 per cent) the fastest-growing in the

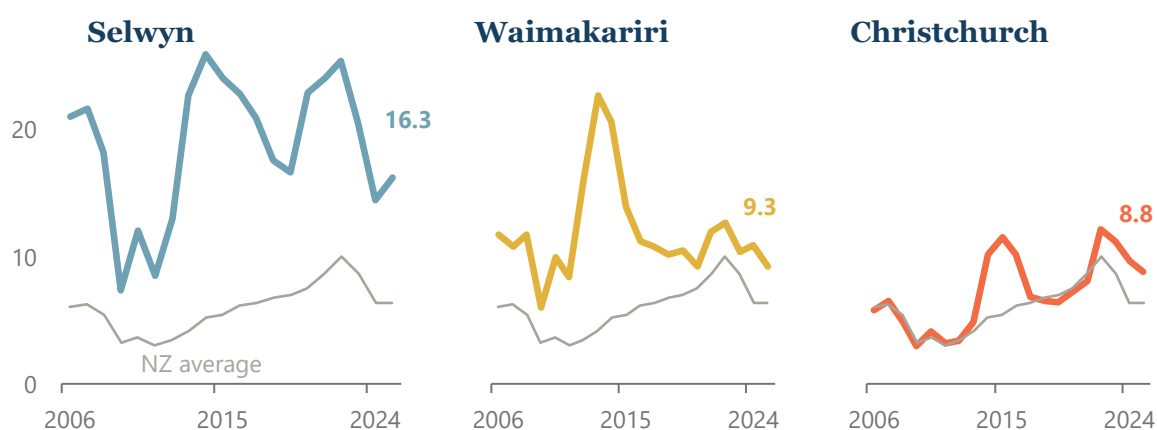
comparison. The recent contrast is sharper: from 2020 to 2025 national employment growth slowed to about 1.0 per cent a year, and Auckland (1.2 per cent) and Wellington City (0.8 per cent) slowed with it, while Greater Christchurch did not.

Across the 20 years to 2025, Selwyn consented new dwellings at about three times the national rate per resident and Waimakariri at about twice, while Christchurch City built at close to the national rate. Building has turned down since 2022 as interest rates rose, nationally and across the larger centres, but Selwyn was still consenting 16.3 dwellings per 1,000 residents in 2025, which is two and a half times the national rate. Selwyn and Waimakariri have been among the country's most active homebuilders for two decades, as set out in **Figure 12**.

These figures count new dwellings rather than building consents, so a multi-unit development is counted as all of its homes. That distinction matters for Christchurch City, where building has shifted markedly toward multi-unit housing since the earthquakes, while Selwyn and Waimakariri remain predominantly standalone houses.

FIGURE 12 NEW DWELLING CONSENTS PER 1,000 RESIDENTS **Selwyn and Waimakariri have built at much faster rates than the rest of New Zealand**

New dwelling consents per 1,000 residents, 2006–2025

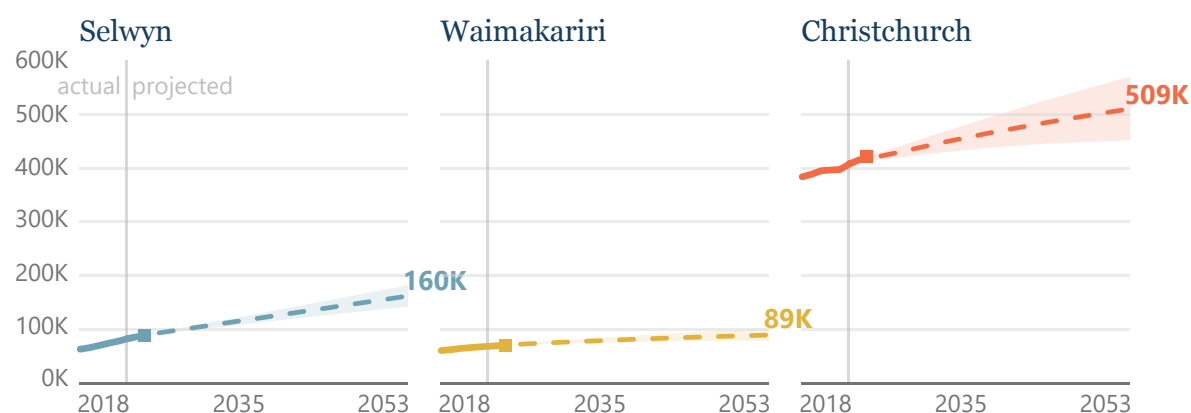


Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, new dwelling consents, years ended 30 June 2006–2025.

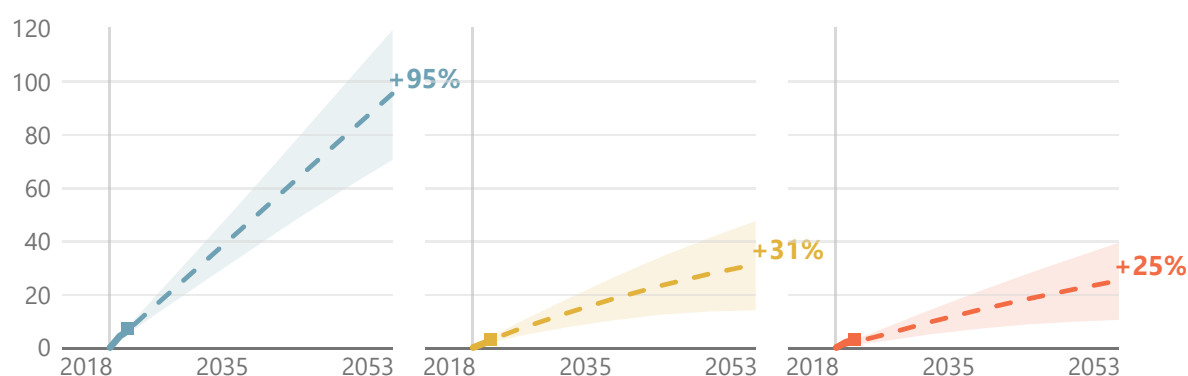
Statistics New Zealand produces subnational population growth projections based on births, deaths, and internal and international migration. As set out in **Figure 13**, on those projections, Selwyn will grow substantially, with Waimakariri experiencing faster growth than Christchurch but substantially below Selwyn.

FIGURE 13 PROJECTED POPULATION GROWTH – HIGH/MEDIUM/LOW **Selwyn is projected to have the highest growth over the next 25 years**

Resident population projections in thousands



Resident population projected growth



Source: HW analysis of Stats NZ, subnational population projections (2023-base), to 2053.

The same picture appears in the councils' own planning, though the story is one of the projections catching up with growth. Under the Greater Christchurch partnership each council adopted a growth scenario in its Housing and Business Assessment: Christchurch City planned on the medium projection, and Selwyn and Waimakariri on medium-to-high, reflecting their faster growth. Our Space 2018–2048 planned on about 640,000 people by 2048, and the 2021 Housing Development Capacity Assessment lifted that to a series reaching 705,600 by 2051. This was partly a normal upward revision, and partly because the projection base moved forward three years.

Statistics New Zealand has since revised its projections up so that, for Selwyn, the medium projection now sits close to where the high projection used to be.¹¹ Selwyn's adopted growth model runs from about 79,300 in 2022 to 153,360 by 2054, and Waimakariri's long-term plan aligns to the Stats NZ high variant, reaching about 101,791 by 2054.

The pattern is the same across both the official projections and the councils' own planning: growth in Greater Christchurch has consistently tracked at or above the upper end of the scenarios, and the projections have been revised up to meet it.

¹¹ The latest medium projection reaches about 150,000 by 2053, above the old 2018-based high of around 137,000.

4 **This evidence in context**

This memo has set out one dimension of the question: the economic geography of Greater Christchurch, measured through where people work, where they spend, and where the region's major facilities draw their users from. On that evidence, Greater Christchurch functions as one economy with a clear extent. That is a relevant input. It is not, on its own, a case for any particular boundary: a functional economy can be governed in more than one way, and the council lines that suit it are a matter of judgement that runs well beyond economic geography.

A structural decision turns on more than the people-flow economy, and boundaries are best weighed function by function. Some functions (e.g., the labour market, housing, transport demand) may share the geography mapped here. Others have a different natural footprint: freshwater, flood and catchment management follow river systems and need to be held at that scale whatever the commuting picture; some functions need regional or national scale for specialist capability; some are genuinely local. Each can be tested against how doing more of it changes cost, where the capability sits, its natural geography, whether its effects spill across boundaries, and whether those who benefit and those who drive its costs are the same people who pay, and then placed at the scale that performs it best. This evidence could be included in that function-by-function assessment to help develop a defensible structure for government.

Appendix: Method, data and limitations

Approach. This memo describes the functional economy of Greater Christchurch. It reports what the evidence shows and takes no view, for or against, any boundary change.

Study areas. All figures are built from Statistics New Zealand statistical area 2 (SA2) units on 2023 boundaries. The two subregional candidate areas are Greater Christchurch (232 SA2s) and Greater Christchurch south of the Waimakariri River (203 SA2s); Canterbury (331 SA2s) is used for comparison. SA2 units are assigned to councils using the Stats NZ statistical-area-to-territorial-authority concordance (2023).

Commuting. Commuting evidence is from the Stats NZ Census journey-to-work, 2018 and 2023. Figures are reported on an all-employed basis: people who work from home are counted as working in their own area. Self-containment is the share of an area's employed residents who work within it; the labour-market catchment is the share who work in Christchurch City. The boundary-cut figures (Figures 7 and 8) count cross-boundary journeys in both directions and exclude work-from-home. The 2018 census had lower response and more imputation than 2023, so where the two years are compared the comparison should be read for direction, not precise magnitude.

Retail trade. Card-spend figures are from Marketview, supplied via Christchurch City Council. They are electronic card spend only and exclude cash and most online spending. The two-way comparison is held on the common year to June 2025, the point at which Waimakariri left the shared data subscription.

Gross domestic product. GDP is MBIE's Modelled Territorial Authority GDP (MTAGDP), nominal, for the year ended March 2024. It is modelled, and for the candidate areas it is apportioned from territorial-authority totals by each area's in-area share of employment. Switching the apportionment weight to business locations moves the figures by under 3 per cent.

Population, employment and home-building. Population is the Stats NZ estimated resident population at 30 June (2025 provisional); the projections are the Stats NZ subnational projections, 2023-base, to 2053, on the low, medium and high variants, which are scenarios rather than forecasts. Employment is the Stats NZ Business Demography employee count (February), 2000 to 2025. Home-building is new dwellings consented per 1,000 residents, year ended June, 2006 to 2025. Council figures use the territorial-authority series directly; candidate-area population and GDP are apportioned from those totals by

Census and employment weights, while candidate-area employment is summed from the underlying SA2 data.

Facilities and institutions. Facility figures are taken from published annual reports and official facility information, with their stated catchment and role. Some volumes (MidlandPort throughput, hospital patient numbers, airport freight tonnage) are not published and are not estimated.

Limitations and use. Several inputs are modelled (GDP) or partial (card spend), and the population projections are scenarios, not predictions.

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