

April 2025.

MP Tim van de Molen

MP for Waikato



I want to start by acknowledging and thanking the business community – the great people in our region that I engage with every week. Those who take a risk, start a business, deploy capital, hire staff, invest in plant and machinery, innovate and grow – I appreciate your contribution to our economy and our communities. I know the recent recession has been particularly challenging across a broad range of industries and the effort, resilience and commitment to getting through that has been remarkable to see.

The Waikato's geographic location ensures that we're in a prime position to capitalise on the economic growth potential that is now on the table. To ride this wave, rather than be left treading water in its wake, we must scale up infrastructure investment – particularly in transport. The extension of the Waikato Expressway to Piarere is now confirmed, having been cancelled under the last government, with spades expected in the ground in the second half of 2026. Importantly, we've also committed to extending the four-lane expressway through to Tauranga to really unlock the Golden Triangle. With Ports of Tauranga now the busiest port in the country, this is a vital step. Making this connection, given the barrier of the Kaimai range, will not be easy. It is clear that a tunnel through the Kaimai range would be the best solution for our regions; given the economic, safety and social benefits that it would bring. Of course, a tunnel would come with a significant price tag, but we'll be considering the feasibility of this in more detail over the coming year.

Another infrastructure project which would bring economic benefits to the Waikato region is the development of a Great Walk on the Kaimai range. Featuring beautiful landscapes and remarkable flora and fauna between Mount Te Aroha and Wairere Falls near Matamata, the proposed Kaimai Great Walk would highlight the natural resources and tell the stories of early Māori trade routes and European gold mining efforts. As the northern most Great Walk in New Zealand, it will attract tourism dollars to the region from both domestic and international visitors, bolstering our local economy.

There are many external factors that influence us here in the Waikato, too. As Chairman of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, events beyond our shores are constantly front of

mind for me. Many of you will also have been following the recent tariff implementation programme from the United States of America, and the retaliatory action from many impacted countries. Unfortunately, this has an impact on the many exporters in our region, but also on the wider economy. I firmly believe that open, tariff-free trade will give the most successful, long-term outcomes – minimising costs, encouraging innovation and improving accessibility. This has been the foundation of so much of New Zealand's success and we will continue to fight for a stable, rules based international system to support this.

International trade is vital for our region, and this is why the Prime Minister and the Trade Minister have been working so hard to secure greater market access. The recently completed agreements with the United Arab Emirates and with the Gulf Cooperation Council are two good examples of this. And of course, the exciting announcement while the Prime Minister was in India last month that both countries have agreed to commence negotiations on a trade agreement has massive potential for our region.

In early April, our government delivered a new Defence Capability Plan, which will guide our investment in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) over the next 15 years. This will see us reach the internationally expected level of investment of 2% of GDP about halfway through this timeframe and most notably, it includes a massive \$12 billion of funding over the next four years. A significant amount of this funding will go towards new or enhanced technologies like uncrewed vehicles, cyber and space, which presents significant opportunities for Waikato companies that are already operating in these areas or are looking to expand into them.

It has been a particularly challenging time for the building and construction sector through the recent economic downturn. Their difficulties have been exacerbated by needless restrictions which have slowed the sector, with construction costs up 40% since 2019 and consent processing times below acceptable levels. Lack of competition in product choices and supply chain issues has also contributed. We're changing legislation to enable 250,000 more construction products to be used in NZ, such as varieties of plasterboard, cladding, and insulation. This will make it easier and more affordable for builders to access the materials they need. We're also allowing Granny Flats of up to 70sqm to be built without requiring consent to help with our housing shortage. Of course, it's imperative our buildings are safe, well-built, and resilient to weather, so we're cracking down on poor performers, implementing improvements to the complaints process and strengthening the disciplinary and transparency processes.

Another key drag on our system is the Resource Management Act (RMA). It's a problem that's long beleaguered Kiwis and businesses, holding them back from unlocking economic growth and also failing to adequately protect the environment. We're replacing the RMA with a Natural

Environment Act and a Planning Act. The former will concentrate on the use, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment. The latter will regulate the use, development, and enjoyment of land. Our primary sector, producers of world class food and fibre, will certainly benefit from the overhaul of the RMA. Alongside this, we're slashing unnecessary red tape holding them back in a range of other areas. A robust food and fibre sector is vital to the strength and resilience of our economy.

The potential for economic growth in the Waikato is significant. I'm excited to be part of a government that is enabling to ride that wave by making it easier and more affordable for businesses to get the job done.

Do you live in the Waikato electorate? Enter your address here to check – www.vote.nz/maps/find-your-electorate/. Should you wish to share your views on an issue, or reach out for my support, please feel welcome to contact me on 0800 GET TIM (0800 438 846) or email Tim.vandeMolenMP@parliament.govt.nz. I'm regularly in all the communities around the electorate and look forward to connecting with you.

Authorised by Tim van de Molen, 22A Arawa Street, Matamata