

Queenstown's growth pressures continue to intensify entering 2026

Benje Patterson

Independent economist

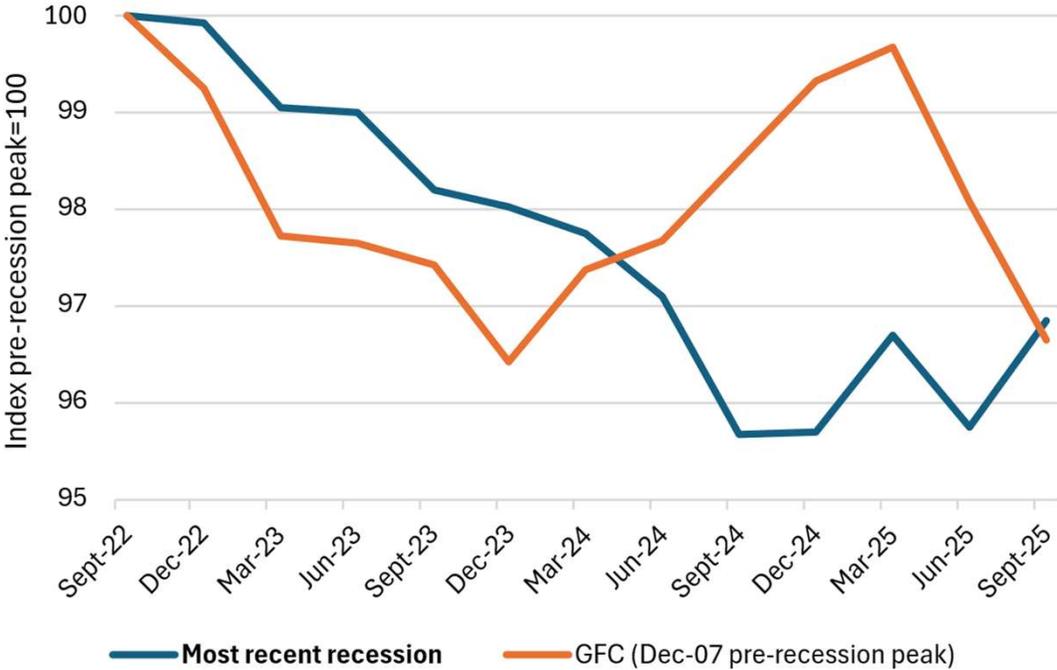
benje@benjepatterson.co.nz

4 March 2026



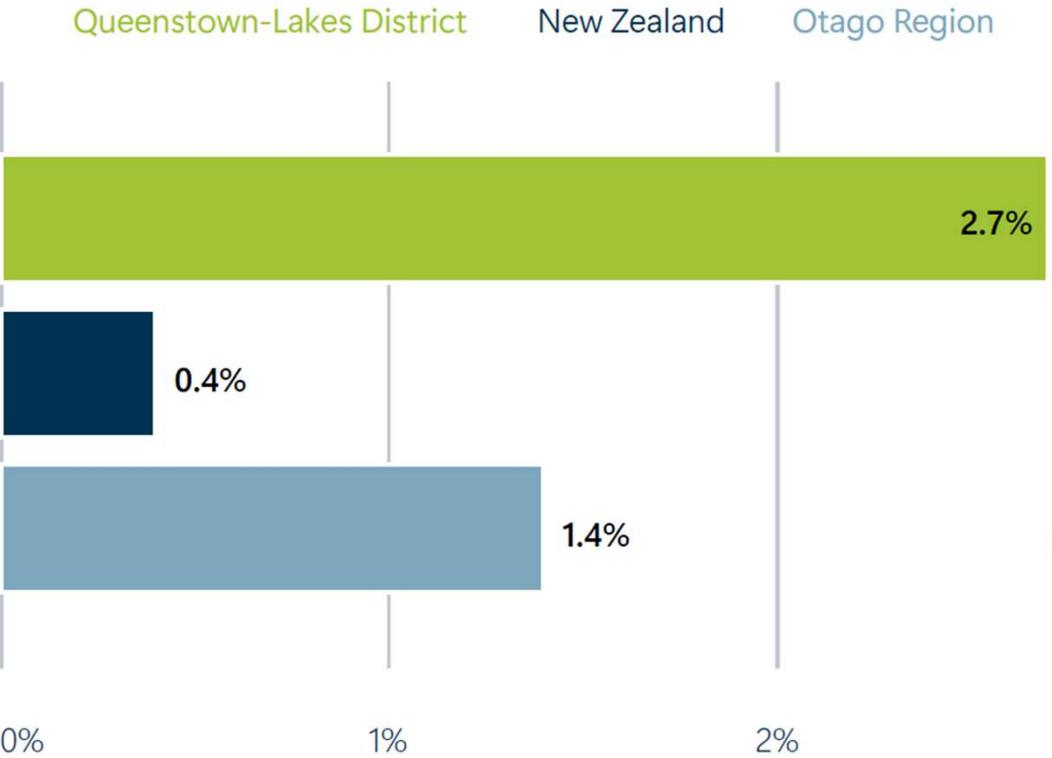
NZ's recent recession has been deep and prolonged

Recession and recovery: GFC vs most recent GDP per capita, calculated from Statistics NZ data



But not for Queenstown - we thrived in '25

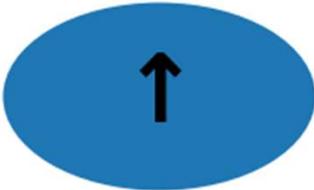
Figure 1. Gross domestic product growth (provisional)
Annual average % change December 2024 - December 2025



► Source: Infometrics
December Quarterly
Monitor

Even tourism has exceeded pre-Covid activity

Queenstown Airport International Arrivals - January 2026



+9.8% p.a.
Annual Growth



166%
of Pre-Covid Level



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Momentum visible in a range of activity indicators

Indicator	Queenstown-Lakes District	Otago Region	New Zealand
Gross domestic product (provisional)	+2.7% ▲	+1.4% ▲	+0.4% ▲
Business counts 🕒	+6.2% ▲	+2.6% ▲	+1.0% ▲
Consumer spending	+0.5% ▲	+0.6% ▲	-1.0% ▼
Traffic flow	+3.8% ▲	+2.8% ▲	+0.8% ▲

🕒 Data up to the September 2025 quarter.

People just want to be here

Figure 59. Annual change in health enrolments
Annual average % change December 2024 - December 2025

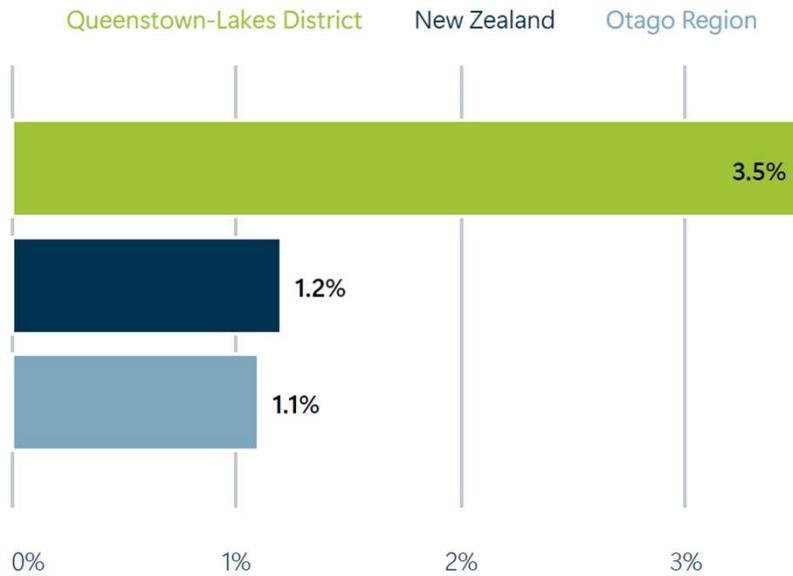
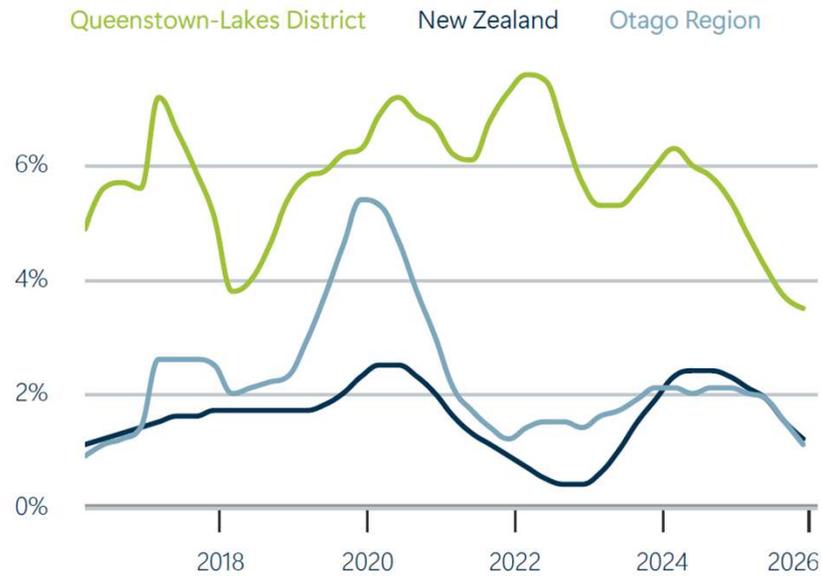


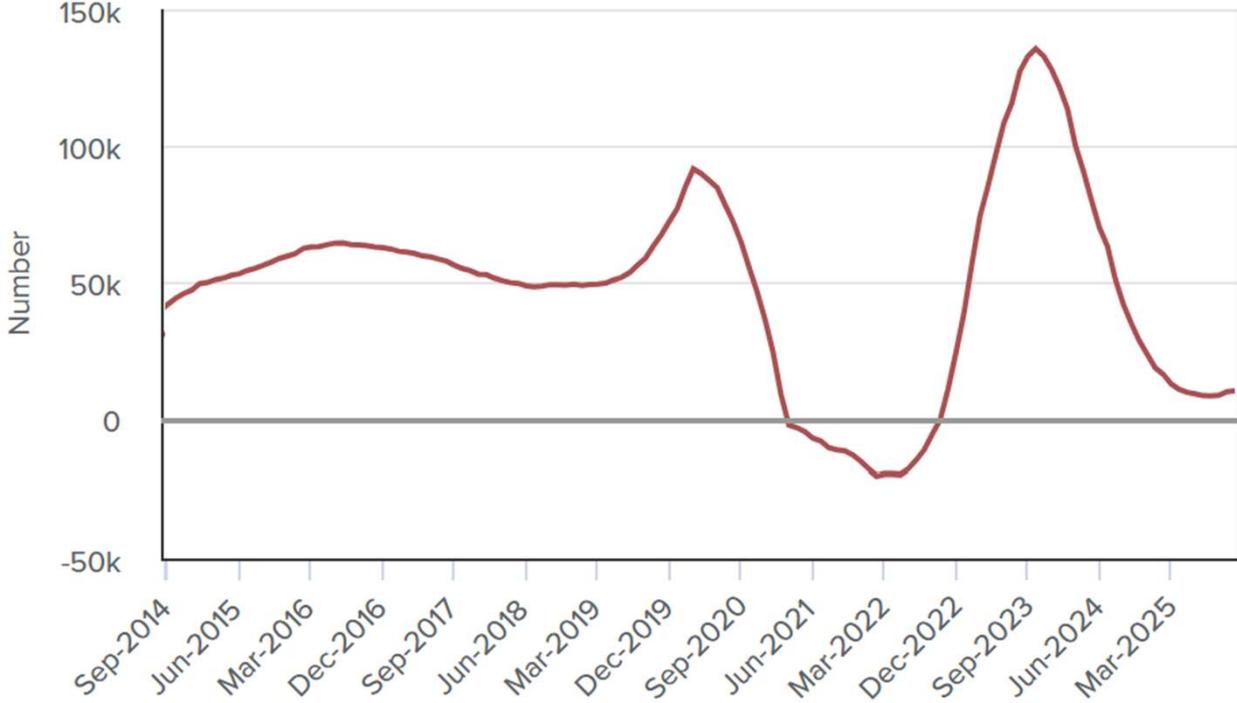
Figure 60. Health enrolments
Annual average % change



► Source: Infometrics
December Quarterly
Monitor

Despite slower migration into New Zealand

Estimated net migration



Stats NZ



Even last year employer were hiring new staff

Figure 25. Employment (place of residence) growth
Annual average % change December 2024 - December 2025

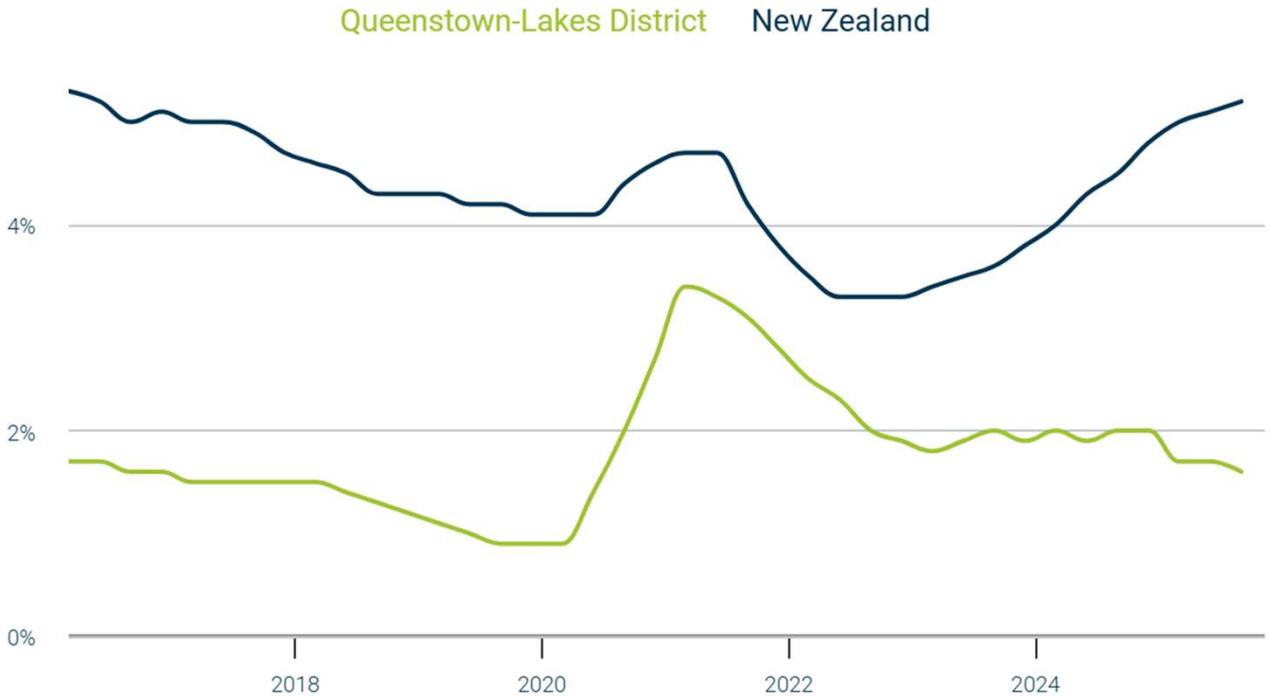


Source: Infometrics
December Quarterly
Monitor

Queenstown Lakes is the star of the show

Unemployment rate

Annual average rate



Broader context: SI speed vs NI speed

**5.9% North Island
unemployment
rate**

in Dec-25, up from
5.3% in Dec-24

**3.6% South Island
unemployment
rate**

in Dec-25, down from
4.2% in Dec-24

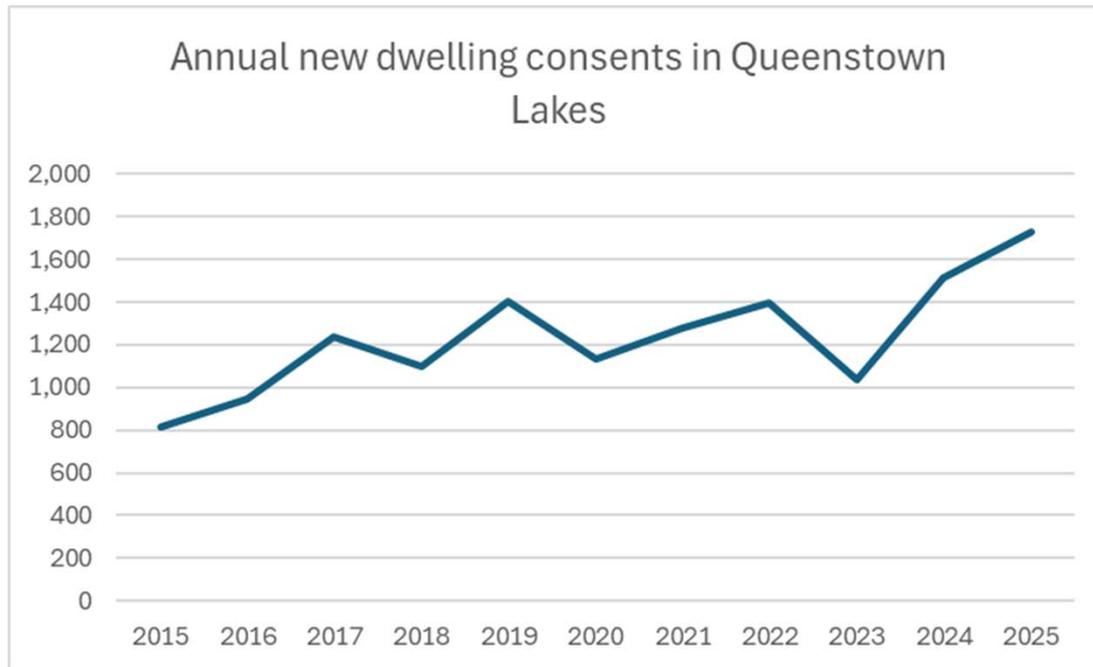


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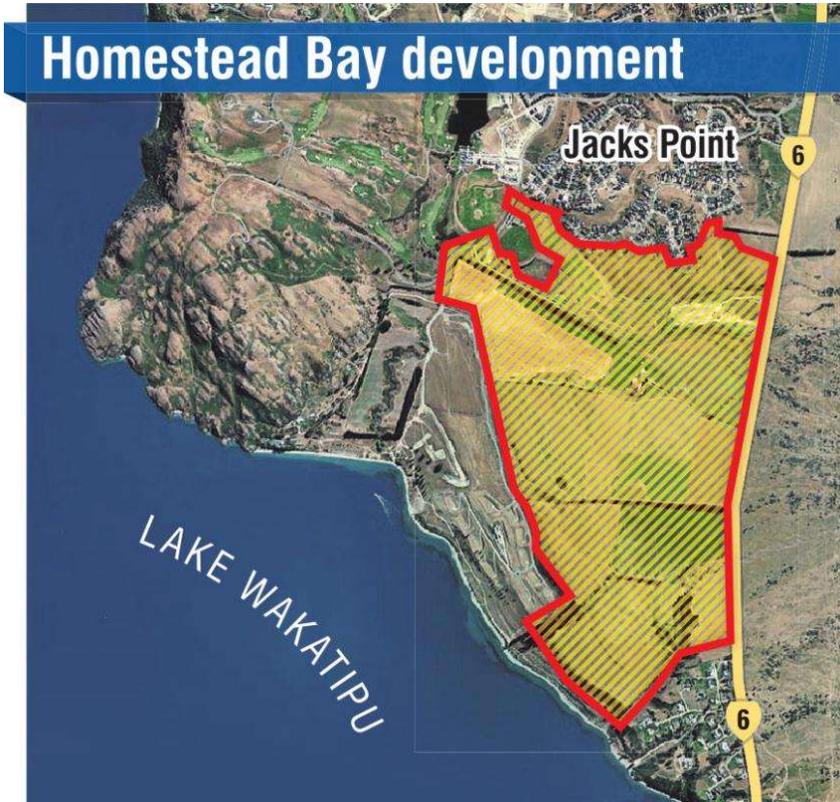
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Skyrocketing building consents suggest even more to come



- ▶ More than 1,700 consents last year - just 2 years ago it was around 1,000
- ▶ 4,000 to 5,000 potential new residents in these consented homes once built alone

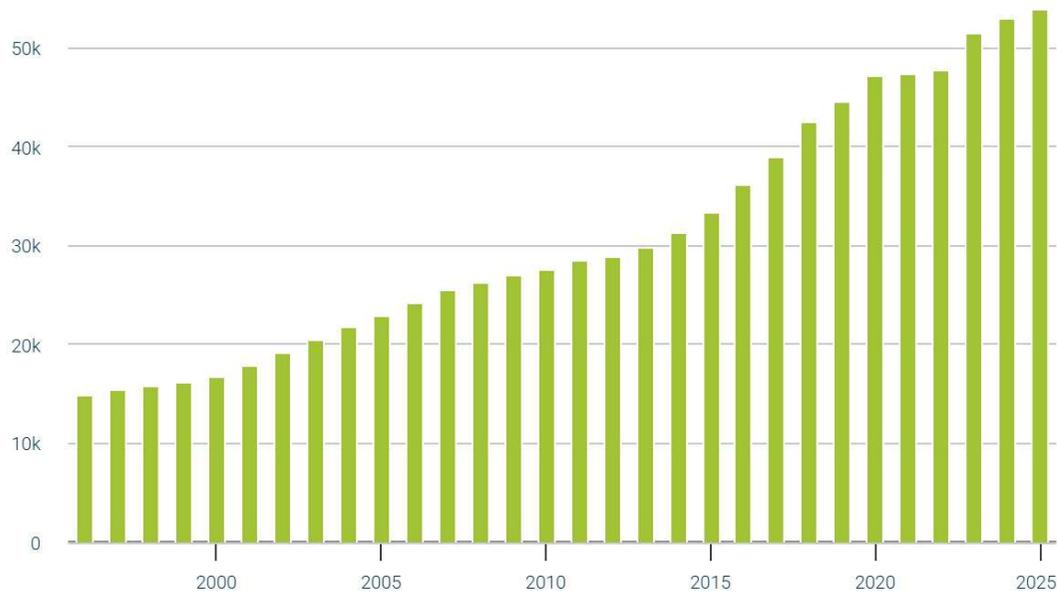
And these two images alone could mean 20k more people again....



Queenstown Lakes has sustained this rapid population growth for decades

Population level

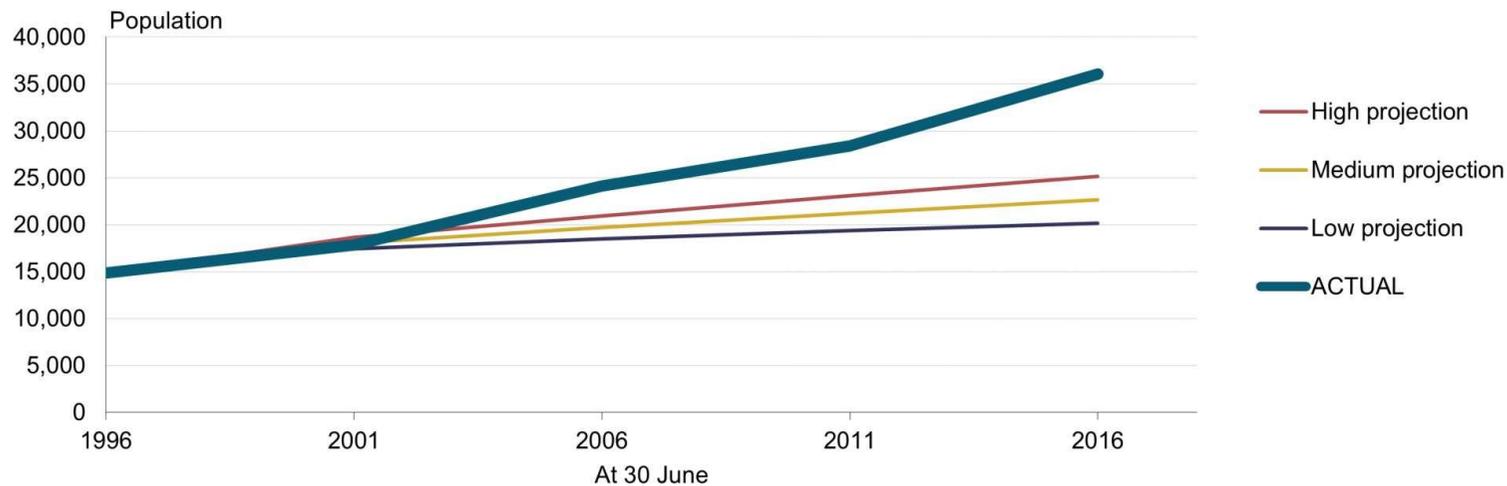
People, annual level, June years



- ▶ 4.4%pa last 20 years vs 1.3%pa nationally
- ▶ Population up well over 3x since 2000, 2x in 15 years
- ▶ NZ took between 1960s and today for population to double

Undercooked historical growth projections meant we weren't ready for the craziness that had eventuated by the 2010s

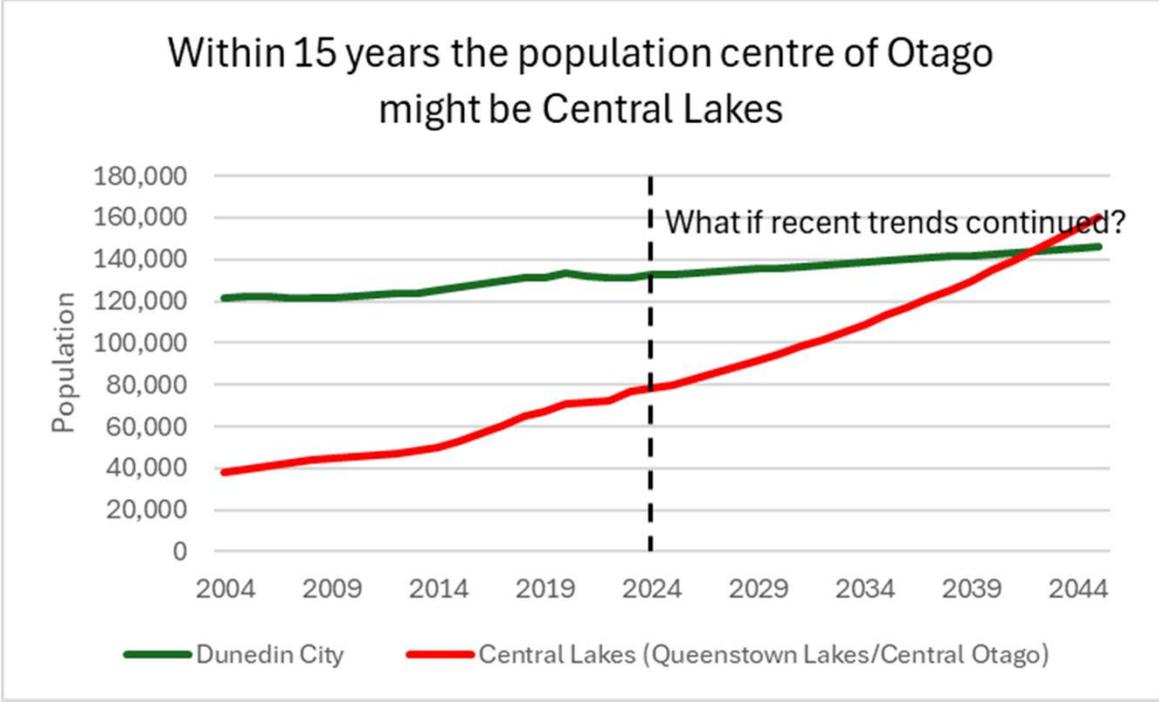
Projected and estimated resident population 1996–2018
Queenstown-Lakes district
1996-base projection (published 1997), Statistics New Zealand data



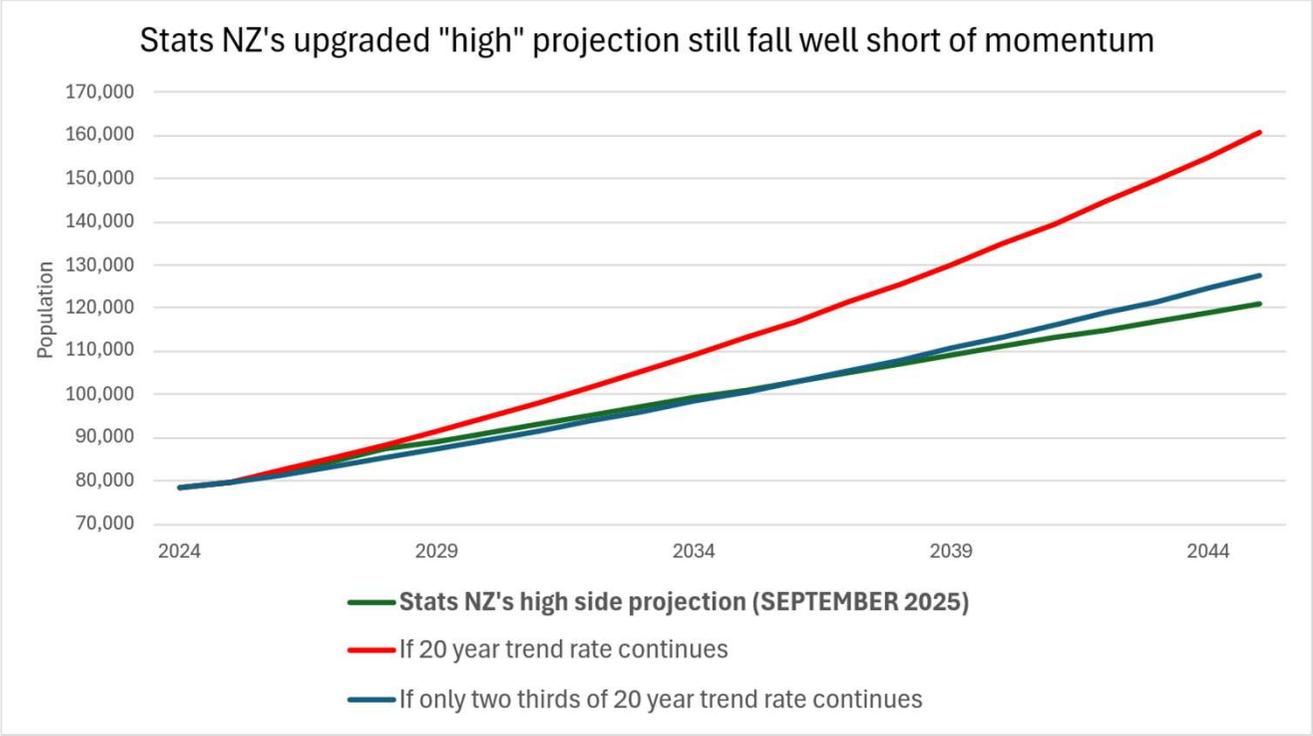
And fast-forward 20 years- the memo “Queenstown marches to its own beat” still had not been read



If trends continue Queenstown-Wānaka-Cromwell golden triangle becomes South Island's second most populous urban area by the 2040s



High projections were recently upgraded but over long-term only represent half the momentum from last 20 years

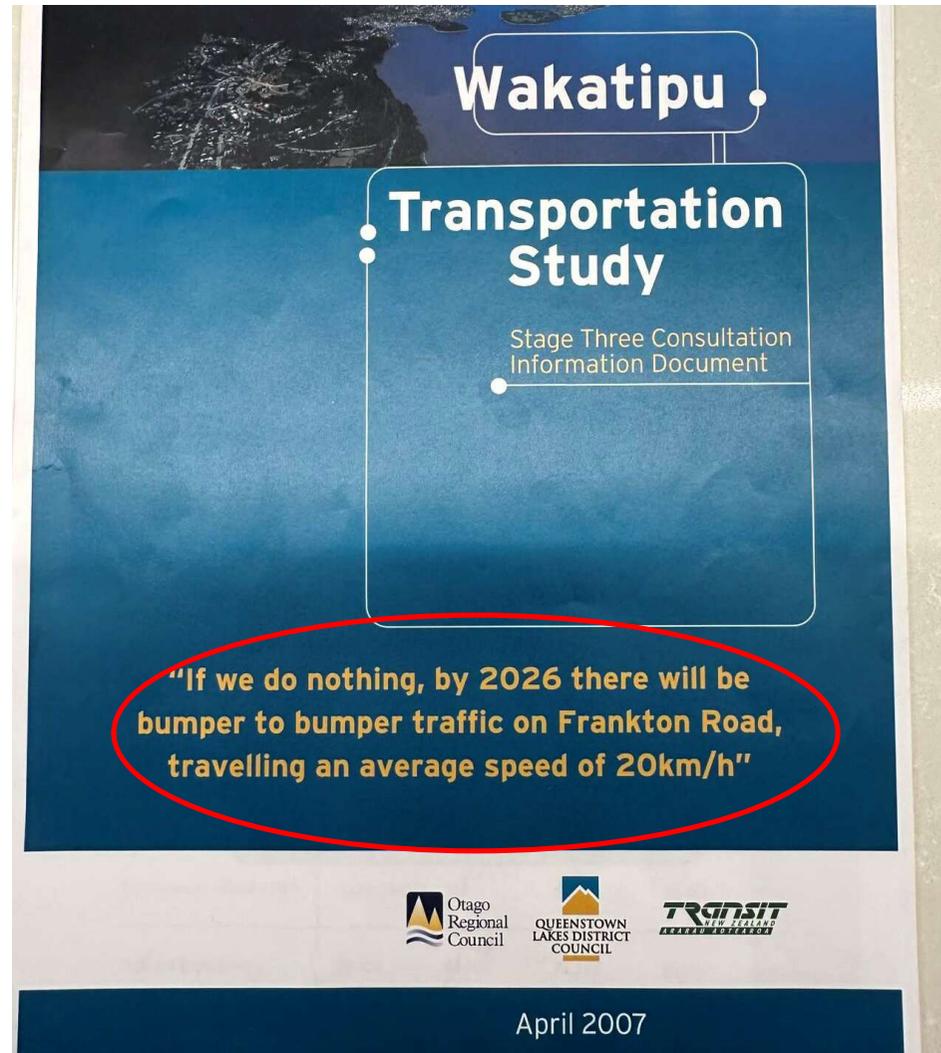


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Bottlenecks are everywhere, imagine if this view had been the one that had been leading the conversation



Thank you!

