

WBOP 2026 Business Outlook Survey

Key Insights

In February 2026 Priority One surveyed 169 businesses (a range of large enterprise to SME's) across the Western Bay of Plenty to understand business confidence, workforce trends, challenges, and priorities for the regional economy.

The results show a region with growing business confidence and strong economic potential, alongside ongoing challenges around costs, workforce and infrastructure.

Business confidence is rebounding

Business sentiment has improved significantly since 2023.

- **77%** of businesses are confident about the future of their own business
- **76%** are confident about the future of the local economy (up from 56% in 2023)
- **70%** believe business confidence in the region is improving (up from 35% in 2023)
- **63%** believe the Western Bay economy is performing better than other regions in New Zealand
- **64%** are confident about the future of the New Zealand economy (up from 45% in 2023).

Businesses are still facing real challenges

Despite improving confidence, businesses continue to face pressures.

Key challenges include:

- Tough economic conditions
- Rising operational costs (rates, wages, insurance, energy)
- Difficulty attracting skilled staff
- Regulatory complexity
- Uncertainty in global and domestic markets.

Workforce trends

Businesses are actively adjusting their workforce.

- **32%** of businesses made staff redundant or let staff go in the past 12 months (up from 9% in 2023)
- **66%** have hired staff in the past 12 months
- **66%** plan to hire staff in the next 12 months
- **67%** would consider offering paid work experience to students.

Technology and AI are transforming business

Technology is expected to have a major impact on the way businesses operate.

- **85%** of businesses identified AI or automation as likely to impact their organisation over the next 12 months.

Businesses also identified the following as key technology trends shaping the future of business:

- Cybersecurity risks
- New digital technologies
- Automation and productivity tools.

What businesses say matters most for the regional economy

Businesses ranked the following as the most important priorities for regional growth:

- Infrastructure investment – 78%
- Clear vision and strategy for the region – 72%
- Business attraction – 64%
- Investment attraction – 62%
- Transport and easing congestion – 59%

What this means for the region

The survey highlights a region with strong confidence and growth potential, but where unlocking the next phase of growth will require continued focus on:

- Infrastructure and transport investment
- Talent attraction and workforce development
- Innovation and productivity
- Investment and business attraction.

These areas align closely with Priority One's strategic focus on infrastructure, innovation, investment and talent.

What businesses want Priority One to focus on

Businesses want Priority One to:

- Advocate strongly for regional infrastructure investment
- Support business growth, innovation and productivity
- Attract investment and new businesses to the region
- Strengthen collaboration and connections within the business community
- Represent business interests with local and central government.

For enquiries, please contact:

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