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Central Waikato Region Sports Fields Assessment Waipā District Report

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Author: Richard Hutchinson and Terri Hendriks

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RSL Contact

Richard Lindsay
Phone: 021 2746540
Email: richard@rslc.nz

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1. Introduction

1.1 Goals of this Assessment

Hamilton City, Waikato District and Waipā District Councils are the major providers of sports fields in the central Waikato as part of the open space networks they manage and maintain. Winter sports code participants who benefit from this provision include those playing football, rugby and rugby league, their associated clubs, supporters and volunteers. This participation in organised sport provides benefits, including the overall physical well-being of participants and social connectedness.

The purpose of this study is to understand the current provision (supply) and the current and future requirements (demand) for winter code sports fields in the central Waikato. The study provides this assessment for the Hamilton City, Waikato District and Waipā District Council areas.

This report outlines the findings for the Waipā

1.2 Scope and Methodology

This study focuses on sports field use by winter codes football, rugby and rugby league.

1.2.1 Current Demand and Supply

Regional sporting organisations (RSOs) have supplied their data on clubs and teams to understand the current level of demand for sports fields from football, rugby and rugby league across the central Waikato. This information has been used to understand the current demand for sports fields in this area.

This demand assessment has then been compared to the current supply of sports fields in the area to identify where there may be either a surplus or a shortfall in sports field provision. Opportunities to address shortfalls in adjoining areas where there is surplus supply are also provided.

2.2.1 Future Forecasts of Demand and Supply

Using future projections of changes in the active population (5-59 years in age), and the typical number of football, rugby and rugby league teams (using team generation rates), the projected future demand and supply of sports fields is estimated. Due to the ageing population, growth in the 'active population' (defined for this study as ages 5 to 59) is lower than overall population growth.

An assessment of the likely requirements for future provision is concluded, taking into account where there is known planned future supply changes. Future supply surpluses or shortfalls are identified in a dashboard format to inform future planning and decision-making for sports field provision in these areas.

It was agreed by the participating councils and Sport Waikato that the study assess the current year (2025) and projected demand in 2038.

2.2.2 Key Assumptions

- A net surplus/shortfall of zero field hours is sought. This implies that supply equals demand. While this approach balances supply and demand, it is prudent in future planning to aim to provide a surplus of provision to act as a buffer to factors such as weather-related closures or field maintenance closures.

- Sports fields are considered secured for community use if they are council owned or secured from other ownership through a formal agreement (lease, partnership etc) for a period of longer than one year.
- Demand for winter fields is predominantly made up of regular competition games and regular training by community-based teams (i.e., not schools) involved in winter competitions. While school teams are usually excluded, a number are now beginning to enter teams as clubs within the community leagues. The teams, where school teams are actively participating in a community competition, are included in this demand assessment. School teams that participate in inter-school competition on school fields are not included.

Included as demand	Excluded from demand
All regular competition and training use by community based (like a club or community group) teams for the three main winter codes (rugby, league and football).	Any use outside the marked field playing area.
Any school use, both general use and sports team competition and training that is either regularly or intermittently scheduled on community fields.	Any use considered to be 'non capacity' reducing (i.e. does not impact on the use of the field by teams or groups that are included as demand in this study)
Representative training and games that occur during the season	School use of school fields.
High performance, skills development or academy programmes	
Any 'one-off' demand, such as for the club, regional or national games or tournaments.	
Regular or intermittent use by minority sports	
Regular or 'one-off' community events	

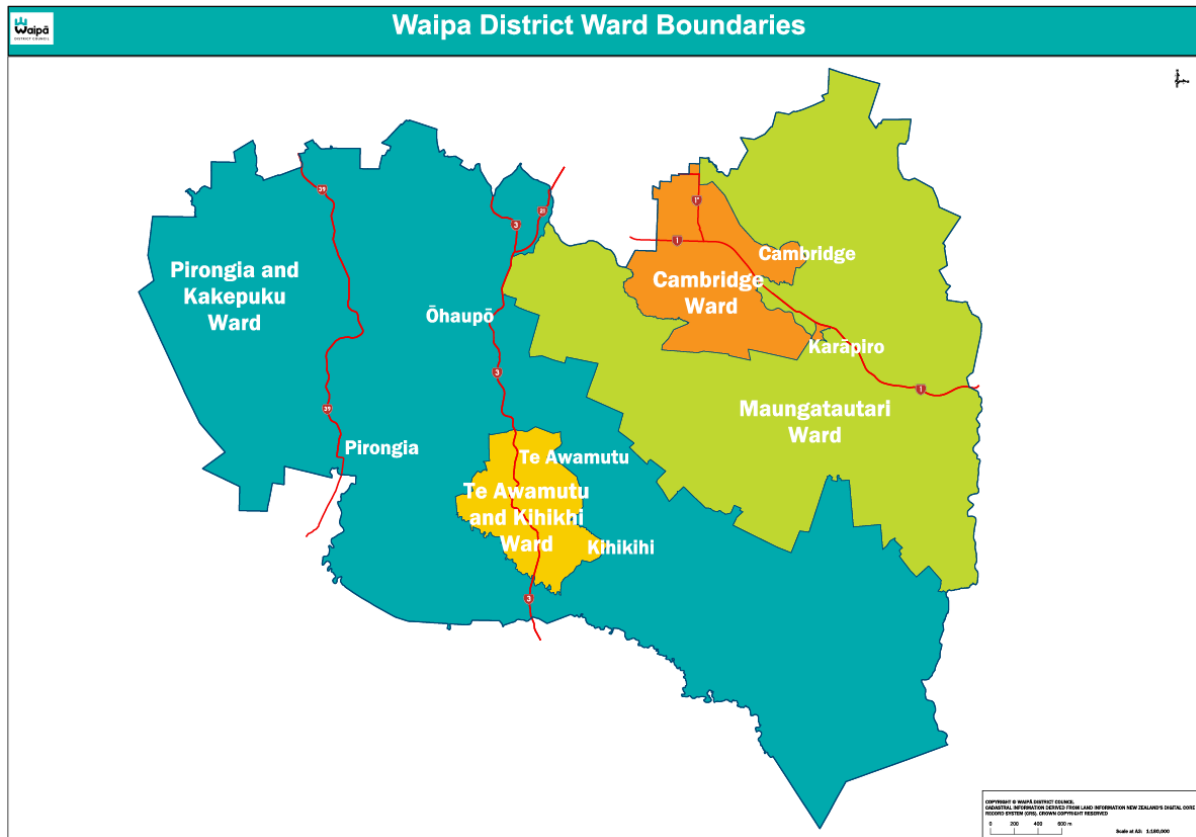
1.3 The Study Area

This study covers all 4 general electoral wards (2023) within the Waipā district, the boundaries of which are shown in Figure 1.1.¹ Waipā District Council is divided into four community analysis areas that align with the four Wards:

¹ These ward names and boundaries have been updated for the 2025 elections, including Māori Wards being groupings of electoral wards and are not specifically assessed.

- Pirongia- Kakepuku
- Te Awamutu
- Cambridge
- Maungatautari.

Figure 1-1 Community Analysis Areas (Waipā Wards)



2. Demand Assessment

2.1 Population Trends

Population growth is a key driver of increased demand for sports fields. The NZ Statistics (medium) projections were used as the basis for all future demand projections, which identified:

Waipā District

- Population is projected to increase by 10.7% from 2023 to 2038 – from 60,900 (2023) to 67,400.
- Due to the ageing population, growth in the 'active population' (defined as 5 to 59 years) is lower, with the 5 to 59 age group projected to increase by 3.8%, from 32,720 to 33,955.

Table 2-1 Population Change Active Age

	2023		2038	
	5 – 19 Years	20 – 59 Years	5 – 19 Years	20 – 59 Years
Pirongia Kakepuku	2,013	3,596	2,012	3,712
Te Awamutu	2,967	5,635	3,248	5,873
Cambridge	5,373	9,343	5,045	10,063
Maungatautari	1,423	2,373	1,400	2,603
TOTAL	11,775	20,945	11,705	22,250

Population data – Stats NZ

The Active Age population is projected to change in each community analysis area. It highlights where growth in the age groups most likely to participate in winter field sports is expected to be higher or lower. Areas with stronger growth in the active age population are likely to experience greater pressure on sports fields in the future, while areas with static or declining active age populations may see more stable or even reduced demand.

Changes to the active population impact significantly on future growth across the district, with the overall demand projected to fall even in areas projected to experience growth. This is as a result of an ageing population. An ageing population impacts on the projected demand in two ways:

- A static or declining active population
- An ageing within the active population. This is significant as approximately 80 – 85% of all participation comes from the 5 to 18 year old age group.

2.2 Winter Sports Fields Codes

This part of the report covers the three main winter sports field codes:

- Football
- Rugby
- Rugby League

Rugby Union

- There are 7 rugby clubs in the area, fielding 124 teams.

Rugby League

- There are 1 league clubs in the area fielding 6 teams.
- The majority of regular club league is played on Saturdays.

Football

- There are 4 football clubs in the area, fielding 148 teams.
- The majority of football is played on Saturdays, with all mini play on Saturday mornings.

2.2.1 Team Numbers by Community Area

Teams are not spread evenly across all of the community analysis areas.

Each club's teams were identified and then distributed across the club's main catchment area and have been allocated to the areas where the team plays home games or trains, and college teams regularly playing on community fields to the area where the college is located.

Table 2-2 Number of Teams Generated within the Community Analysis Areas

Community area	Rugby 2019	Rugby 2025	League 2019	League 2025	Football 2019	Football 2025	Total Teams 2019	Total Teams 2025
Waipā Total	53	124	2	6	94	148	149	278
Pirongia - Kakepuku	22	46	0	0	8	8	30	54
Te Awamutu	24	38	2	6	23	45	49	89
Cambridge	7	40	0	0	63	95	70	135
Maungatautari	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Teams are distributed across the Waipā District by code and community analysis area. Some areas, such as Cambridge, have a high concentration of football teams, while others have a stronger emphasis on rugby. These patterns reflect existing club structures and catchment areas and help to explain where demand for training and competition fields is currently most concentrated.

There are currently no teams based in Maungatautari. Players from within this area currently travel to clubs based in other areas of the District. It is assumed that any increase in demand by 2038 will be incorporated within these other clubs.

2.2.2 Field Demand Across the District

Demand hours are based on the field space teams in different codes and at different levels require to play games and train.

Winter fields have a finite capacity for play before the field surface suffers long-term damage. For the purposes of this study, it has not been possible to calculate the impact of 'other use' on the capacity available for community sport. It is therefore considered that the other use impacts on the net surplus or shortfall of community capacity i.e. if a community area is showing a shortfall and 'other use' is identified then the projected shortfall is increased.

Winter Sport - Regular demand

Winter sport in Waipā requires 364 hours per week.

Table 2-3 Waipā– Demand in full field equivalents (FFE) hours per week

	Weekend (Mainly competition)	Weekday (Mainly training)	Full week
Waipā	118	246	364

The total weekly demand for winter sports fields in Waipā, is broken down into weekend (mainly competition) and weekday (mainly training) use. The figures highlight that weekday training demand is higher than weekend competition demand, which has implications for how fields are allocated and scheduled. Understanding this balance is important for identifying when and where capacity constraints are most likely to occur.

2.3 Future Demand

A Team Generation Rate (TGR) is calculated by dividing the total active population in each grade by the current number of teams, i.e., the TGR is the size of the active population at that particular level that is required to produce 1 team.

Once the TGR is identified at each age grade, this is applied to the future population projections for each age band in the future population to project the likely number of teams at each grade in the future. Once the projected team numbers are known the future demand is calculated (assuming game lengths, field sizes and training requirements remain constant).

In addition to population growth, it is also possible to consider the changing participation rates within individual codes (sport development factors). These can be positive or negative and account for changes in, for example, sport popularity and demographics. These factors are assessed using information from a range of sources, including historic team number trends over and above natural population growth, sport development targets from RSO, club membership projections and other factors that could affect team numbers, such as sport marketing programmes, local, regional, national and international events, changing sport popularity and changing demographics.

Analysis of the available information would indicate that participation rates are unlikely to vary significantly from the population growth rates; therefore, the sports development factors have not been included.

2.3.1 Team Generation Rate (TGR)

In Waipā, there is 1 team for every 118 people aged 5 to 59, with TGR's varying between codes.

Table 2-4 Team Generation Rates (TGR) by Community Area and Code (1 team per XX people)

	Rugby	League	Football	Overall 2025
Waipā District	264	5,453	221	118

The Team Generation Rate (TGR) indicates how many people in the active-age population are required to produce one team in each code. Lower TGR values mean that a larger proportion of the population is participating in that sport. Differences in TGRs between codes and areas reflect local preferences, accessibility of clubs and facilities, and the strength of existing competitions. These TGRs are used to project future team numbers based on population changes.

2.3.2 Projections of Future Demand

Projected demand is calculated by applying the Team Generation Rates (TGRs) to the projected active population (ages 5–59) in each community analysis area. As Waipā's overall population is ageing, the proportion of residents in the active playing age is growing more slowly than total population growth. In some areas, the active population is projected to decline slightly, even where the total population increases. This results in relatively modest increases in team numbers and, in some cases, stabilising or declining demand for winter sports fields. The demand projections therefore, reflect both population change and demographic shifts within the district.

a. District Wide

Current demand is projected to decrease by 22 hours in Waipā by 2038.

Table 2-5 Projected Demand Field Hours Per Week

	2025	2038	Change 2025 to 2038
Waipā District	364	386	+6%

The projected total weekly demand for winter sports fields across Waipā District between 2025 and 2038 is projected to increase by 6%. The modest overall increase in field hours reflects the combined effect of population growth, an ageing population, and relatively stable participation rates. While total demand is projected to grow by around 6%, this growth is not uniform across the District and is influenced by local demographic trends.

b. By Community Analysis Area

The tables below show the projected demand in each community analysis area until 2038.

Table 2.6: Waipā District - Projected Demand by Community Analysis Area (FFE hours per week)

Community area	2025	2038	Change 2025 to 2038
Waipā Total	352	386	+6%
Pirongia - Kakepuku	67	73	+9%
Te Awamutu	125	137	+10%
Cambridge	172	176	+2%
Maungatautari	0	0	0

The projections show consistent but moderate growth in demand across most community analysis areas. Te Awamutu and Pirongia–Kakepuku are expected to experience the strongest increases in field demand, reflecting both population growth and existing participation patterns. Cambridge shows only a small increase in projected demand, despite overall population growth, due to the impact of an ageing population on the active-age cohort. Maungatautari remains at zero demand throughout the period, as it has no established winter sports clubs and a small, dispersed population base.

3. Supply Assessment

3.1 Current Number and Capacity of Fields

Fields are considered secured for community use if they are Council-owned or secured from other ownership through a formal agreement (lease, partnership etc) for a period of longer than one year.

Field supply is considered in terms of a Full Field Equivalent (FFE).

In Waipā District, the 29 secured fields are made up of:

- 16 FFE rugby fields
- 2 FFE league fields
- 11 FFE football fields.

This mix of rugby, league and football fields reflects the historic pattern of club development and code distribution across the District. However, it does not necessarily align with current or future demand patterns, particularly where codes have grown rapidly or where population growth is concentrated.

3.1.1 Capacity of Current Secured Fields

The total weekly capacity is the assessment of how many hours of play each field can withstand before significant damage is caused, which would result in field closure and increased maintenance costs. Associated facilities that impact hours of use, such as irrigation, are included in the assessment.

Field capacity figures have been provided by analysis of previous studies (e.g. HCC Sports Field and Facility Review 2014) and have been reconfirmed with Hamilton City Council, Waikato District Council and Waipā District Council.

Across Waipā, the fields have been assessed as providing 247 full-sized field equivalent (FFE) hours per week.

Note that throughout this report numbers are rounded to the nearest decimal place – this rounding may result in some columns of figures not adding exactly to the totals.

Table 3-1 Capacity of Secured Fields (FFE hours per week)

Community area	Rugby	League	Football	Total
Waipā Total	128	16	103	247
Pirongia - Kakepuku	40	0	0	40
Te Awamutu	40	16	35	91
Cambridge	48	0	68	116
Maungatautari	0	0	0	0

The current weekly capacity of secured winter sports fields in Waipā, expressed in full field equivalent (FFE) hours, is 247 hours. Capacity reflects the number of hours each field can sustain use without causing long-term damage, and takes into account factors such as field surface type, condition, and

lighting. Comparing this capacity with current and projected demand provides an indication of where there may be pressure points, surpluses, or shortfalls in the network.

When this demand is compared with the total weekly capacity of secured fields (247 FFE hours per week), it shows that winter sport in Waipā is already placing pressure on the existing network, with some of the unmet demand being absorbed by fields being used above their sustainable capacity and by unsecured fields such as school grounds.

4. Assessing Supply and Demand

Supply and Demand Dashboards have been developed to identify the supply, demand and surplus shortfall of sports fields by code and analysis area. In addition, projections have been made to 2038 to consider the potential future surplus/shortfall of sports fields should no changes be made to the available sports field network.

Figure 4.1 Waipā District Dashboard

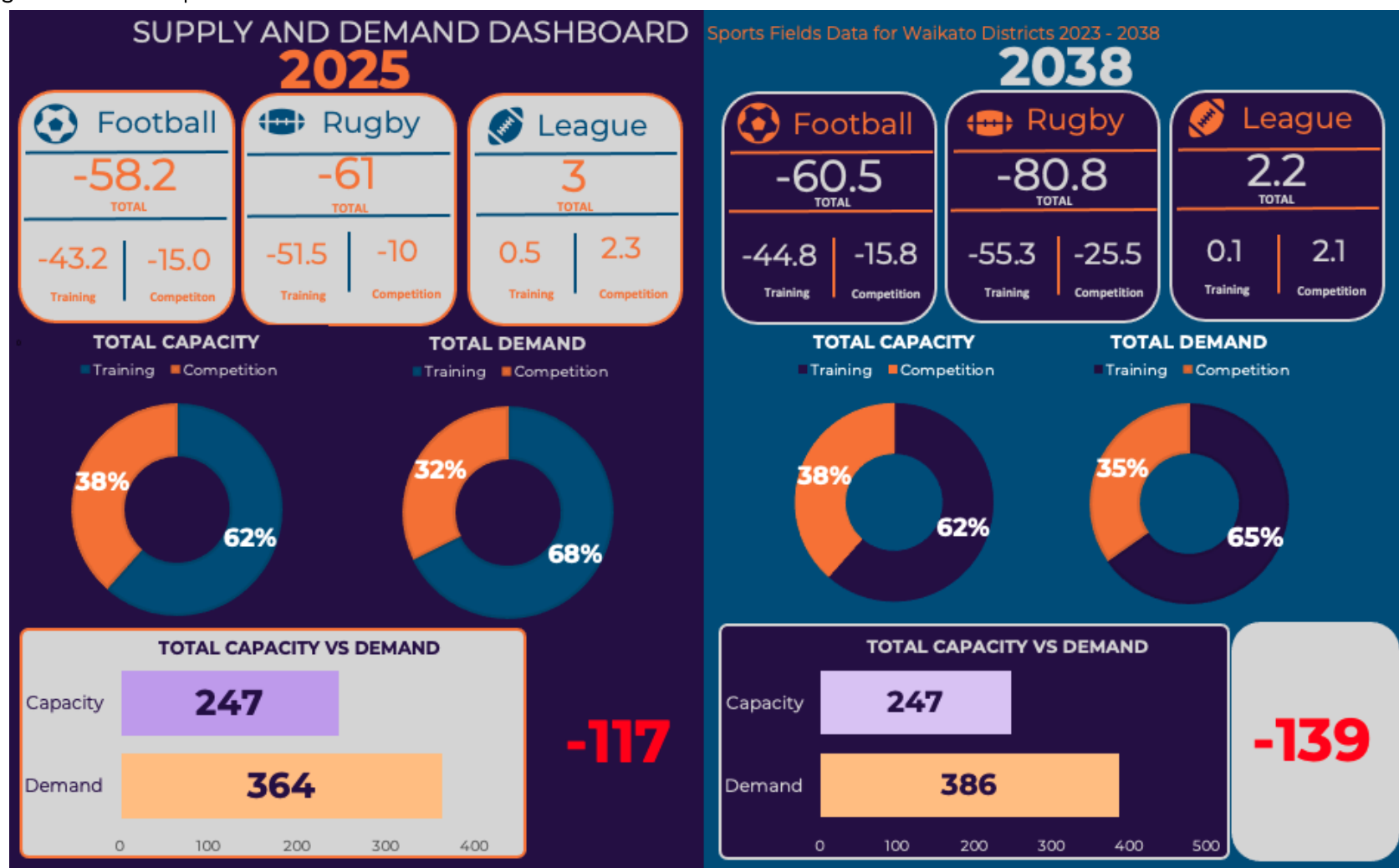


Figure 4.2 Pirongia-KakepukuDashboard

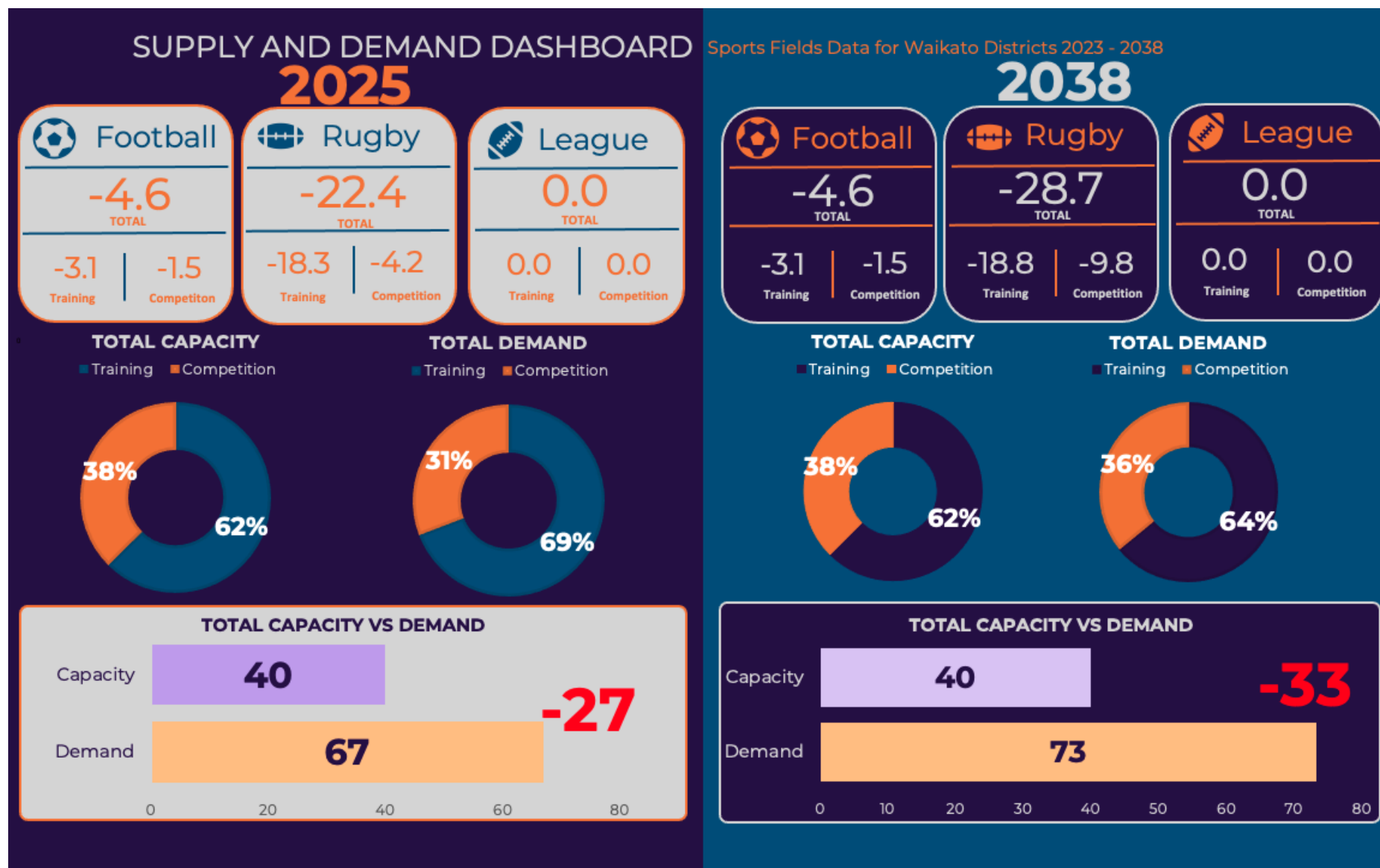


Figure 4.3 Te Awamutu Dashboard

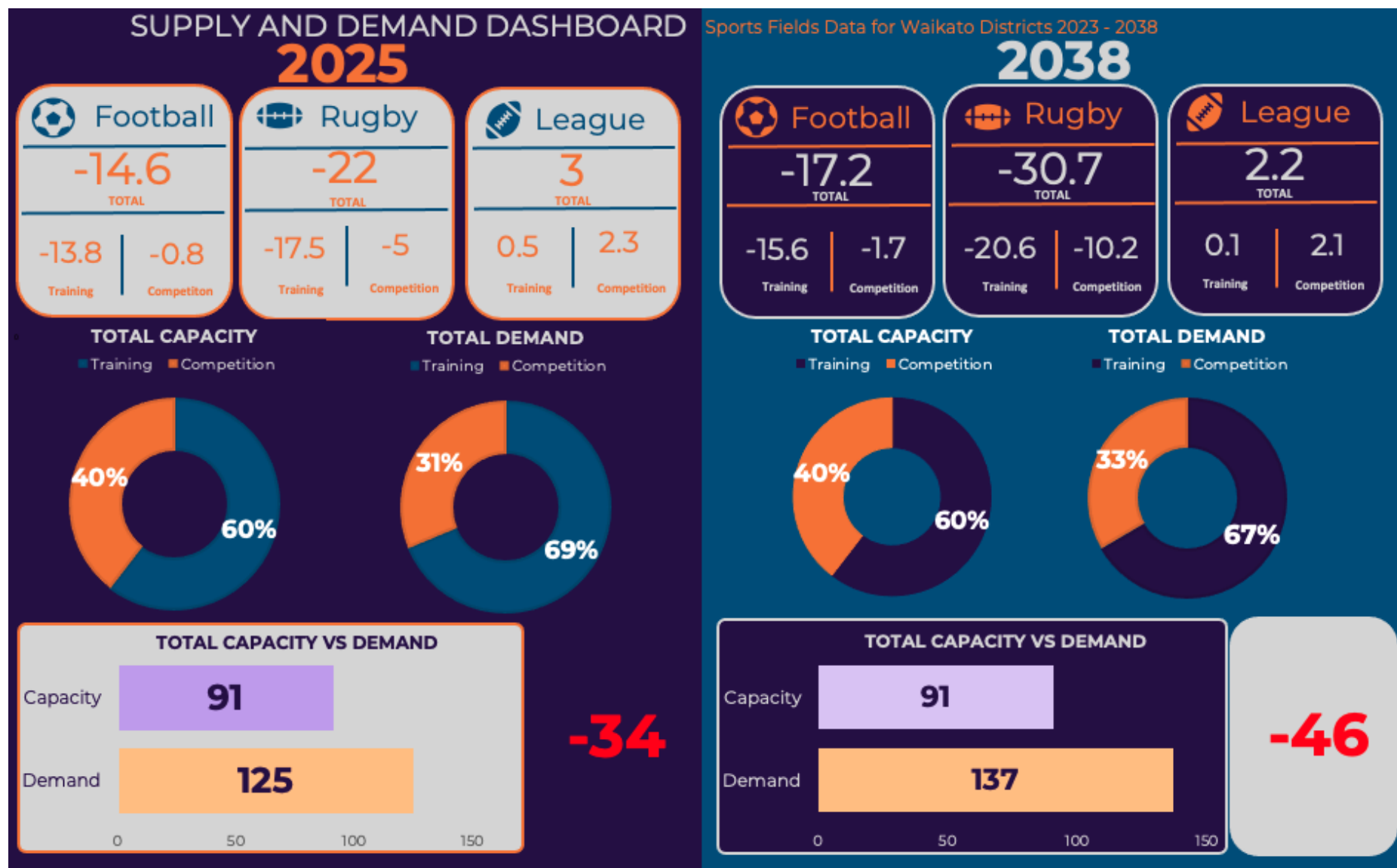


Figure 4.4 Cambridge Dashboard

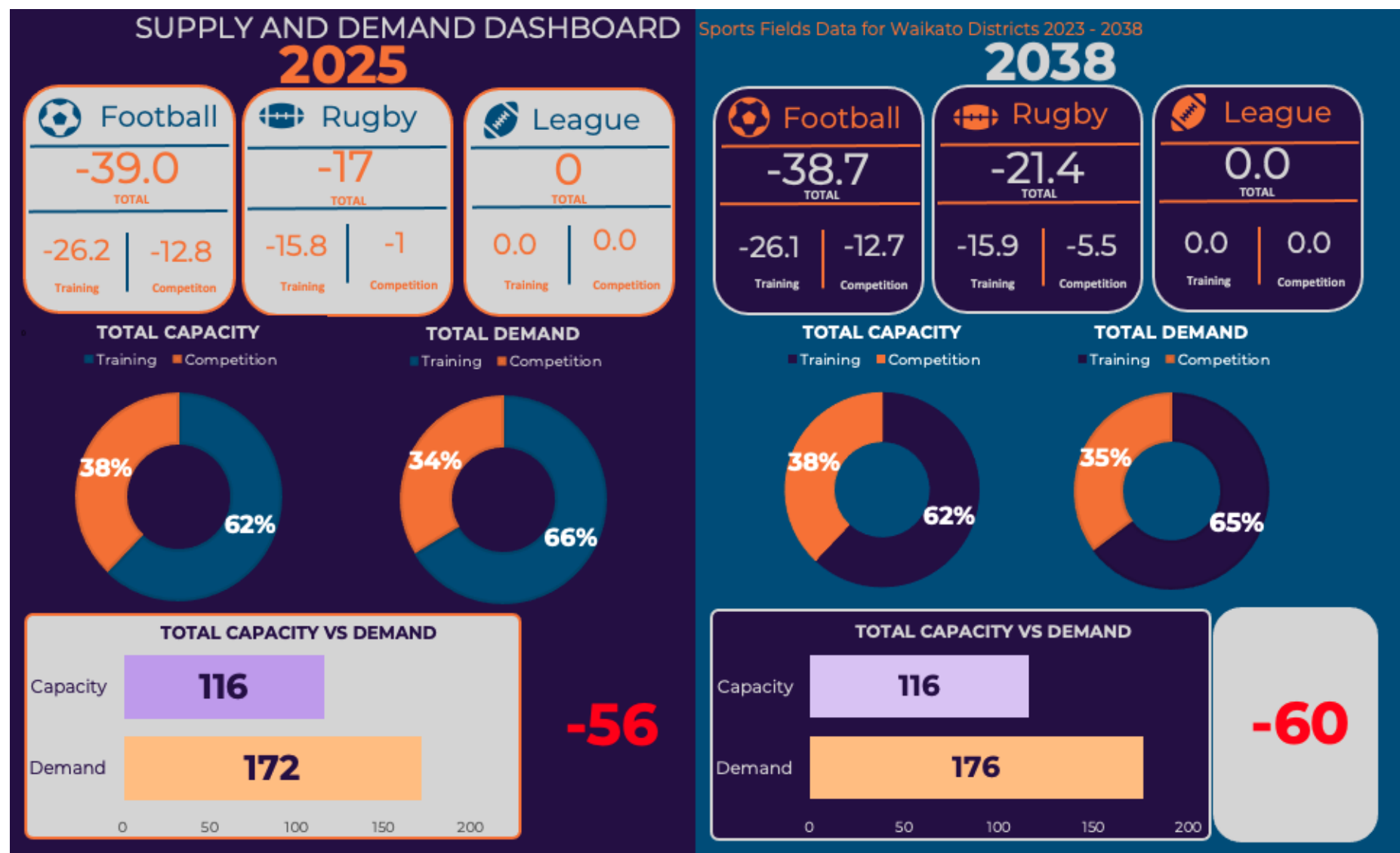
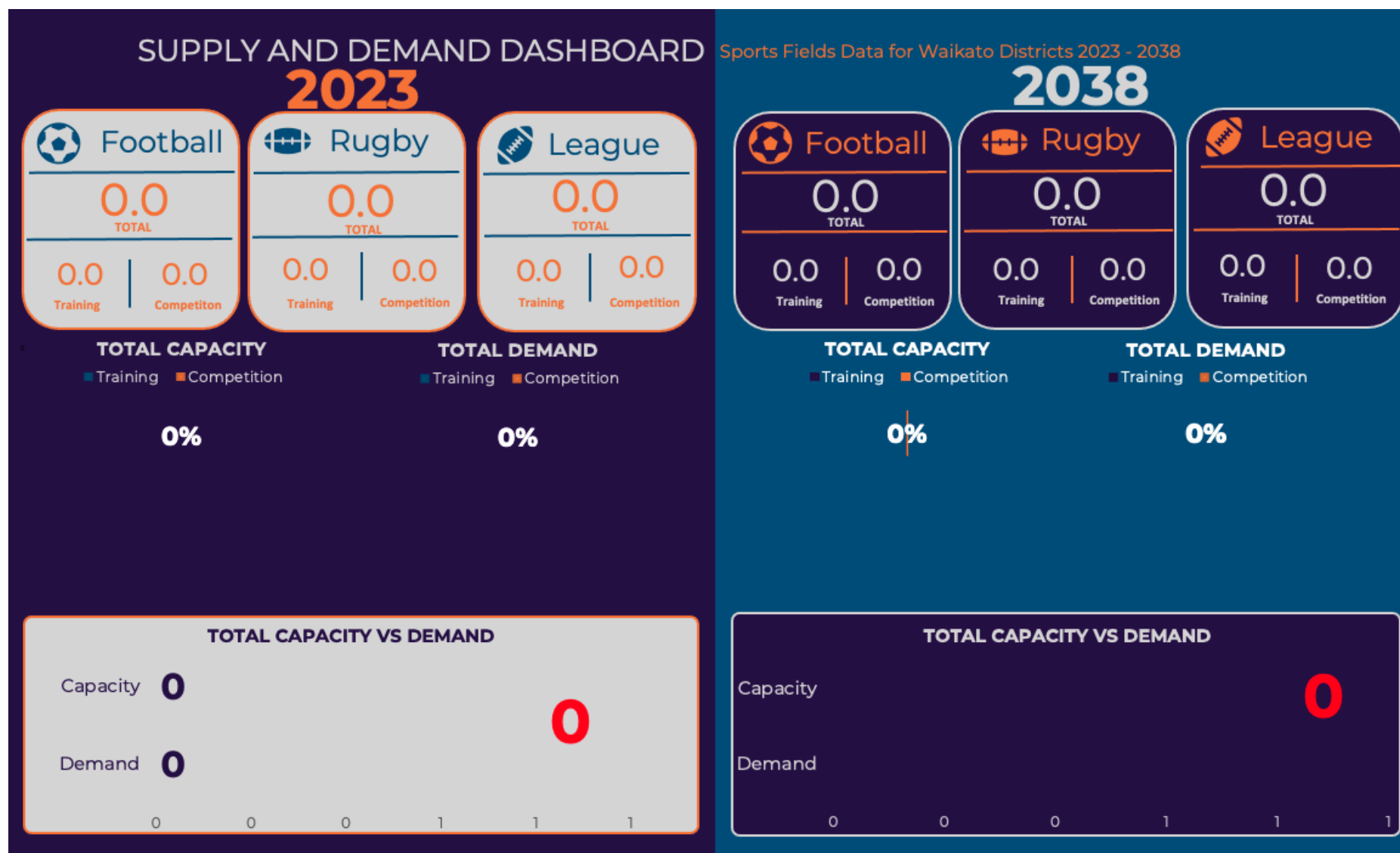


Figure 4.5 Maungatautari Dashboard



5. Options to Meet Shortfall in Field Capacity

There are three main options to meet the shortfall in field capacity:

- More effective use of existing fields through code allocation and use schedules
- Increasing the capacity of existing fields
- Expanding the supply of fields.

The carrying capacity of a sports field (hours per week) varies as a result of a number of factors, including surface type and maintenance schedules. While a field can potentially be open and accessible throughout the week, individual fields have a capacity based on the hours of use that a field can accommodate before the usage has an adverse impact on the field quality, restricting its ability to recover, leading to increased field closures and maintenance costs.

When considering options to meet demand, individual field capacities have been calculated to be:

- Soil Field 8 hours per week
- Sand Carpet 18 hours per week
- Artificial Turf 40 hours a week.

Sub-Regionwide

Across the region, the unmet demand is being absorbed in the current network by fields being used over their capacity, which increases the degradation of the field surface, resulting in increased field closures and a requirement for more regular and intensive maintenance. Reducing reliance on fields being used above their sustainable capacity, and on unsecured fields where community access could be withdrawn at short notice, is an important long-term objective for ensuring a resilient winter sports field network.

In addition, the clubs rely on a network of unsecured fields to meet the demand, e.g. school fields for junior training. Should the situation change at any of these fields, they could be closed to community use with little or no notice, placing an increased demand on the Council networks.

It is recognised that a number of clubs have developed and own facilities, clubrooms and floodlights, which can restrict the ability for reallocation between codes. Where clubs have developed clubrooms and established use of fields over a number of years, the club often develops a sense of ownership of the fields, which can restrict the ability of other codes (winter and summer) being unable to access and use fields that may be underutilised.

Waipā District

Comments / recommendations:

It is recommended that, where opportunities arise, for example, new field development, lease renewals, investment in facilities or agreements are reviewed that Council should take a lead role in the management and operation of the fields network.

Comments / recommendations: To be finalised in conjunction with Waipā District Council staff once the implications of the projected surpluses and shortfalls have been discussed at a local level.

6. Appendix One

6.1 Definitions

Term	Short definition	Additional explanation
Active population	Ages 5 to 59	The age groups most likely to be playing winter code sports.
Capacity	Field hours per week	The number of hours of play per week that a sports field can withstand before sustaining long-term damage. Capacity is determined by both the type and standard of field surface and availability of flood lighting, allowing use after daylight hours.
Demand	Field/turf/court hours per week	The number of field/turf/court hours per week needed for play.
FFE	Full field equivalent	There are a number of small-sided fields/turfs used by junior players. These fields are defined in terms of full field equivalents, e.g. a half-sized field is ½ full field equivalent.
Full field	A full field is one suitable for senior games.	Field measurements vary between codes.
Module	Activity where multiple teams come together to play on a single location	Usually junior-based training or casual/commercial activities – touch, tag
RSO	Regional Sports Organisation	The regional body running the sport in the district. In general, they manage some or all the competitions and act as the link between sports clubs and the National Sports Organisation.
Secure sports fields	Secure fields are those where ongoing use is secured through ownership (e.g. council fields) or a formal agreement (lease, partnership	

Term	Short definition	Additional explanation
	etc) for a period of longer than one year.	
Surplus/shortfall	The balance when demand is matched against supply.	Defined in terms of field hours per week.
TGR	Team Generation Rate	The TGR is calculated by dividing the number of people in the age group by the number of teams in the area in that age group.
Unsecured fields	Fields where use could be terminated at very short notice.	
Weekend and weekday use	Refers to use at the weekend or during the week.	For the three sports field using codes weekend demand is predominantly for games and weekday use for training.

Table 6-1 *Hamilton City Council Sports Field Capacity Assessment (2014)*

Hamilton	Competition Capacity (Hours per Week)	Training Capacity (Hours per Week)	Total Capacity (Hours per Week)
Grade 1	3	12	15
Grade 2	3	7	12
Grade 3	3	5	8
Grade 4	3	3	3
Grade 5	3	0	3

Waikato / Waipā	Competition Capacity (Hours per Week)	Training Capacity (Hours per Week)	Total Capacity (Hours per Week)
All Fields	3	5	8

Projections for the future have been based on the following key assumptions:

- Population growth will be in line with current NIDEA projections.
- The population will age in line with Statistics New Zealand age projections.
- Winter sport will be played in the same manner as currently, i.e. field sizes, game lengths, training requirements and the timing of each code's playing season will continue as now.
- Clubs will continue to draw most of their players from their existing geographic catchment areas.
- The growth or decline in participation rates due to changing ethnicity within the population will change the balance of demand between the current codes. It is assumed that growth in one code will be matched by a decline in another.
- Demand from any new winter code is matched by a drop in demand from an existing code
- School demand for use of community fields will continue at the current level.
- Demand for winter fields for non-sport or irregular use will be managed through the booking system and not significantly exceed current levels.
- There will be a small increase in participation rates across all three codes until 2028 – the increase will vary across the different grades and be in line with recent trends.
- There will be no further increase in participation rates between 2038 and 2063 – growth in demand will be solely from population growth.
- There will be no new clubs formed in areas where a code does not already have a presence

- There will be no unexpected changes to field supply.

6.2 Key Assumptions for Recommendations

The recommendations outlined in the body of the report assume:

- Significant imbalances between codes are addressed through field re-allocation.
- Some surplus capacity should be provided. It is very difficult to ensure optimal allocation of fields between codes due to fluctuations in club team numbers year on year and historic ties to certain sports parks. A small capacity surplus enables council to better meet demand. It also provides some flexibility should fields need to be closed to protect the playing surface from long-term damage, provides opportunities for Central Waikato sub-region to host further one-off events, and for some use by emerging sports. There is very limited information regarding the “ideal” level of additional capacity; however, other studies indicate that this is in the region of 15 – 20% space capacity.

The recommendations in the report are based on projections based on current knowledge. The projections need to be updated regularly to ensure planning is based on the best possible information.

6.2.1 Sports Field Methodology

This study into the supply and demand for sports fields in the Central Waikato Sub-Region has been carried out using the Sports Field Model developed in 2008 by Longdill and Associates in conjunction with Auckland City Council. The Model was peer reviewed by representatives from large and small Territorial Authorities across New Zealand. Since its development, the Model has undergone a number of refinements.

The model is a “peak demand” model aimed at determining the surplus or shortfall of fields for regular week-by-week community use.

What is meant by a peak demand model?

- The methodology focuses on comparing the highest period of demand (peak) with the availability of field supply at that time
- Peak demand is defined as the time of the season when there is greatest demand, that is, when all competitions are at their peak and demand for field space is highest
- Peak demand is also defined as the time of day of greatest demand – e.g., if the greatest demand for adult rugby is on a Saturday afternoon, the methodology will compare demand against supply on a Saturday afternoon to see if the ‘peak’ demand can be accommodated within that time period

6.3 Model Development Stages

The model is based on a 7-stage process:

- Stage One: Identification of all teams
- Stage Two: Determining current field demand
- Stage Three: Identification of all fields
- Stage Four: Determining current field capacity
- Stage Five: Identification of current surpluses and shortfalls (hours per week)
- Stage Six: Identification of future surpluses and shortfalls (hours per week)
- Stage Seven: Analysis and development of options.

Stage	Description
Stage One: Identification of all teams	For each code, all teams based in the Central Waikato sub-region, or playing in a Central Waikato sub-region-based module (centralised competition), have been identified as follows: • 2025 team lists from the Regional Sports Organisations (RSO) and updated with club information • Secondary school teams regularly using community fields from the RSOs and draws • Teams in competitions outside the RSO sourced from competition organisers
Stage Two: Determining current field demand	The competition field hours required for each team, based on field size and length of game, were agreed with RSOs and both councils for the 2019 study. Provision has been made for both home and away competitions (teams usually only play at home 50% of the time) and module-type competitions where all teams gather in a central location. Training field hours requirements are based on averages calculated from information provided by the Central Waikato sub-region's clubs and have been accepted by both councils. They are calculated from the amount of field space required (full, half, quarter field), whether that space can be shared with other teams, the length of a training session and the number of training sessions per week.
Stage Three: Identification of all fields	Both Councils provided field lists including field size and capacity for both weekend and midweek play. Fields owned by other providers have been included where there is a formal agreement for community use for more than one season.

Stage	Description
Stage Four: Determining current field capacity	The capacity for each individual field is calculated as the hours the field can be used each week without sustaining long term damage and divided into weekend and weekday use. The capacity of the fields has been assessed by Council staff or, if privately owned, based on information provided by the club using the field or allocated an 'average' capacity figure. These capacity figures take account of the type and condition of surface and the presence of lighting.
Stage Five: Identification of current surpluses and shortfalls	The total current demand has been matched against the current supply and any surpluses or shortfalls identified. This has been carried out in each analysis area on a code-by-code basis and aggregated to determine the Central Waikato sub-region-wide situation.
Stage Six: Identification of future surpluses and shortfalls	Demand for future years is based on the number of teams produced by the current population, factored up by population growth and sport development growth. A Team Generation Rate (TGR) is calculated by dividing the total population in each grade by the current number of teams. The TGR is the size of the population in that particular grade that is required to produce 1 team. This Team Generation Rate, together with population projections, is used to predict the likely number of teams in the future and hence future demand (assuming game lengths and field sizes remain constant) based on predicted population growth. Population growth figures used in the model are the projections provided by the Council and Stats NZ.
Stage Seven: Analysis and development of options	The resulting data is assessed at community analysis area level, as well as city level and sub-regional level and options developed to ensure supply keeps up with demand.



rslc.nz



021 274 6540



richard@rslc.nz



Rangiora, New Zealand