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Iwi wants international airport at Paengaroa

By [Carmen Hall](#) @Bay_Times

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A local iwi leader says foreign investors could potentially fund a \$1 billion international airport at Paengaroa.

However, the idea has received mixed reactions.

The Western Bay of Plenty District Council mayor and Priority One think the plan has merit, but the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Tauranga's mayor say it is unfeasible.

Ngai Te Rangi chief executive Paora Stanley said he had four investors who could individually fund the project.

It made sense to replace Tauranga, Whakatane and Rotorua airports with one major airport servicing the region, he said.

"The problem isn't about building it, the issue is the red tape and for the city to decide it's a good idea."

Iwi organisations now had the size and financial grunt to be able to attract the attention of offshore investors, he said.

"New Zealand has a group of iwi organisations that have in the range of a billion dollars of assets. Ngati Whatua Orakei has large investments mainly focused on commercial and residential property; Tainui have in excess of a billion dollars in assets and expertise in hotels, property, agriculture; Ngai Tahu have large landholdings and over a billion dollars with interests in tourism, agriculture, property development and many other areas."

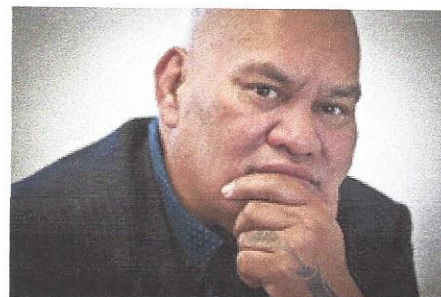
Ngai Te Rangi was on its way to building a significant portfolio of investments and to developing expertise in specific areas of investment, he said.

"What we are doing is aligning with Tainui and Ngati Whatua Orakei to look at specific investments with a particular interest in infrastructure and property."

Mr Stanley said he was not in a position to disclose potential investors but "what I can say is that there is a great deal of interest from Asia, North America and Scandinavia to individually fund what could expand out to a \$1b build".

The project could take 20 years, and he was favour of a new airport also having a cargo division for industries like kiwifruit and horse racing.

"The question is do we have local and regional leaders with vision and courage to make things happen."



Ngai Te Rangi iwi chief executive Paora Stanley is exploring bringing an international airport to Paengaroa. Photo/file

Bay of Plenty Regional Council Strategy and Science acting general manager David Phizacklea said a 2006 report found replacing the local airports at Rotorua, Tauranga and Whakatane with a single regional airport was not financially feasible.

The concept did not win support from city and district councils in the region, and the idea did not progress any further, he said.

Another report in 2014 report recommended developing stronger ties between the airports and a regional approach to airport strategic development.

However, the report found no new case for a regional airport, Mr Phizacklea said.

Western Bay of Plenty District Mayor Garry Webber said a regional airport should be considered as part of the 50-year Smart Growth Horizon plan.

"When you look at that piece of land that the Tauranga Airport is currently on, is that the best use of land that is so close to the city? I use the example that I would hate to see the Western Bay and the Bay of Plenty do to our city what Auckland has done to themselves by not looking forward 50 years.

"One of the concerns I have with local government is a lot of people are looking at the next three years and what is going to get me elected when what we are supposed to be doing is designing our sub-region and region for future generations."

Tauranga Airport manager Ray Dumble agreed no regional airport scenarios were feasible in 2006 but "Tauranga City Council is always open to discussions that have potential to enhance the region".

Tauranga Mayor Greg Brownless said the airport was in a great location and an international airport was unrealistic.

"Just look at Rotorua's attempt and Hamilton's attempt at international airports ... we can't have an international airport in every big city – it just won't work."

Priority One chief executive Nigel Tutt questioned the long-term viability of the airport in its current location.

"In our view, a feasibility study of a potential relocation should be done in the near future – this should include transport and land use considerations."

Mayor Steve Chadwick said an airport at Paengaroa would not service the needs of Rotorua.

"The Economic Development Advisory Group has particularly highlighted the importance of tourism to Rotorua and right now tourists can fly directly to and from Rotorua. An airport at Paengaroa would add more travel time to often already tight schedules and itineraries which would simply not be viable."

Statistics NZ estimated in 2038 the population in Tauranga would reach 164,000 while the Western Bay District would hit 52,500.

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