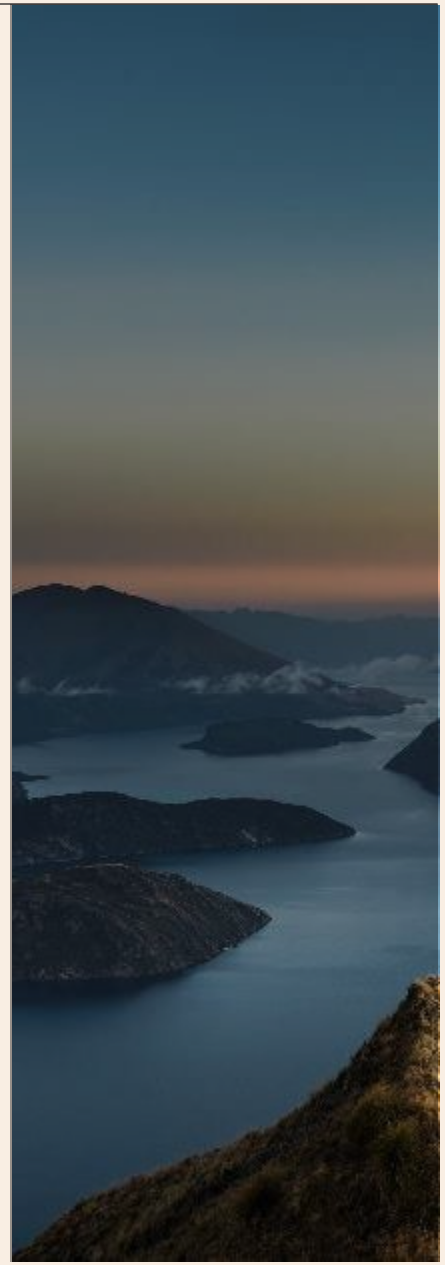
Greater Wellington Community Research

2025

verian

Contents



Research methodology

1.

Online panel survey

2.

Fieldwork took place between 10 April and 8 May 2025

3.

The sample was comprised of 1,002 Wellington Region residents, including:

- 301 Wellington City residents
- 206 Hutt Valley residents
- 188 Porirua residents
- 200 Kāpiti Coast residents
- 107 Wairarapa residents

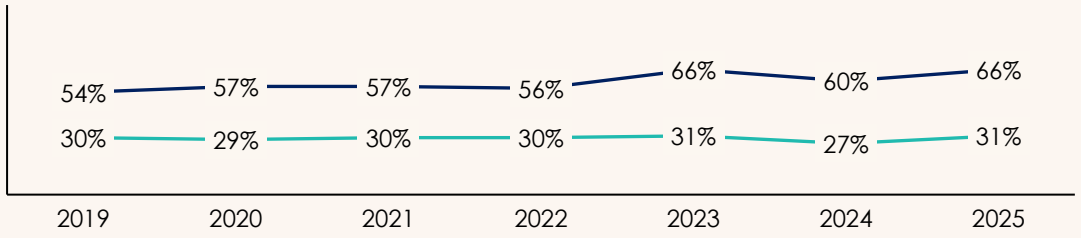
4.

Results are post-weighted to be representative of the regional population by district, age, gender, and ethnicity.

Summary of findings

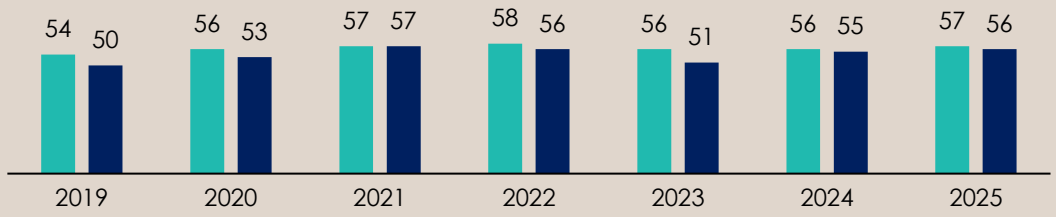
Familiarity

Familiarity with Greater Wellington and Metlink continues to improve.



Reputation

Both Greater Wellington and Metlink saw a small uptick in reputation this year.

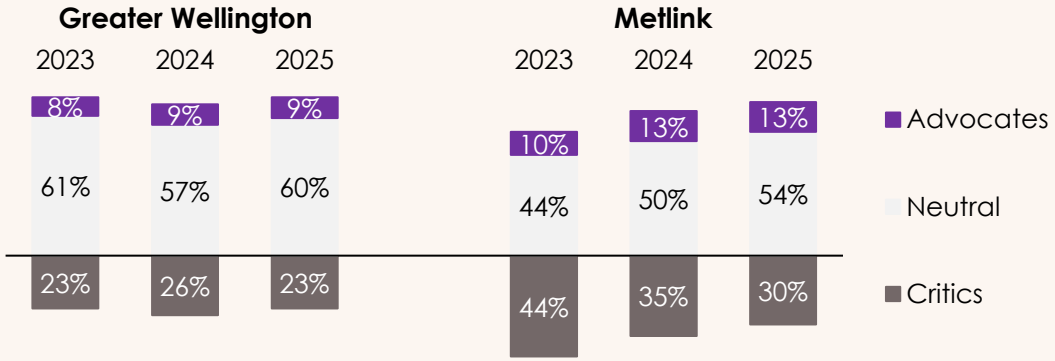


[Reputation is calculated out of 100]

Greater Wellington | Metlink

Advocacy

Criticism of both Greater Wellington and Metlink has eased in 2025. Metlink in particular is recovering well following heightened criticism in 2023.



Key perception and sentiment drivers

Greater Wellington

Analysis identified three key attributes that are currently strong drivers of overall sentiment toward Greater Wellington:

1. Using ratepayer money responsibly.
2. Being seen as a successful and well-run organisation.
3. Fostering trust in public communications.

Resident comments also indicate a desire for visibility of good financial management.

Metlink

Just one attribute stands out as a key driver of sentiment for Metlink: listening to the public's point of view.

Resident comments highlight two sticking points:

1. Ongoing disruptions with the Wairarapa and Kāpiti train lines.
2. Fares prices.

Reputation

Reputation

The overall impression people have of an agency, based on what they think, feel and believe.

It's a foundation for trust.

Why does it matter?

Trusted agencies can operate more effectively and efficiently – when people trust an agency, they're more likely to follow its advice, use its services, and meet their obligations.

Agencies with stronger reputations also tend to better navigate change and adverse situations.

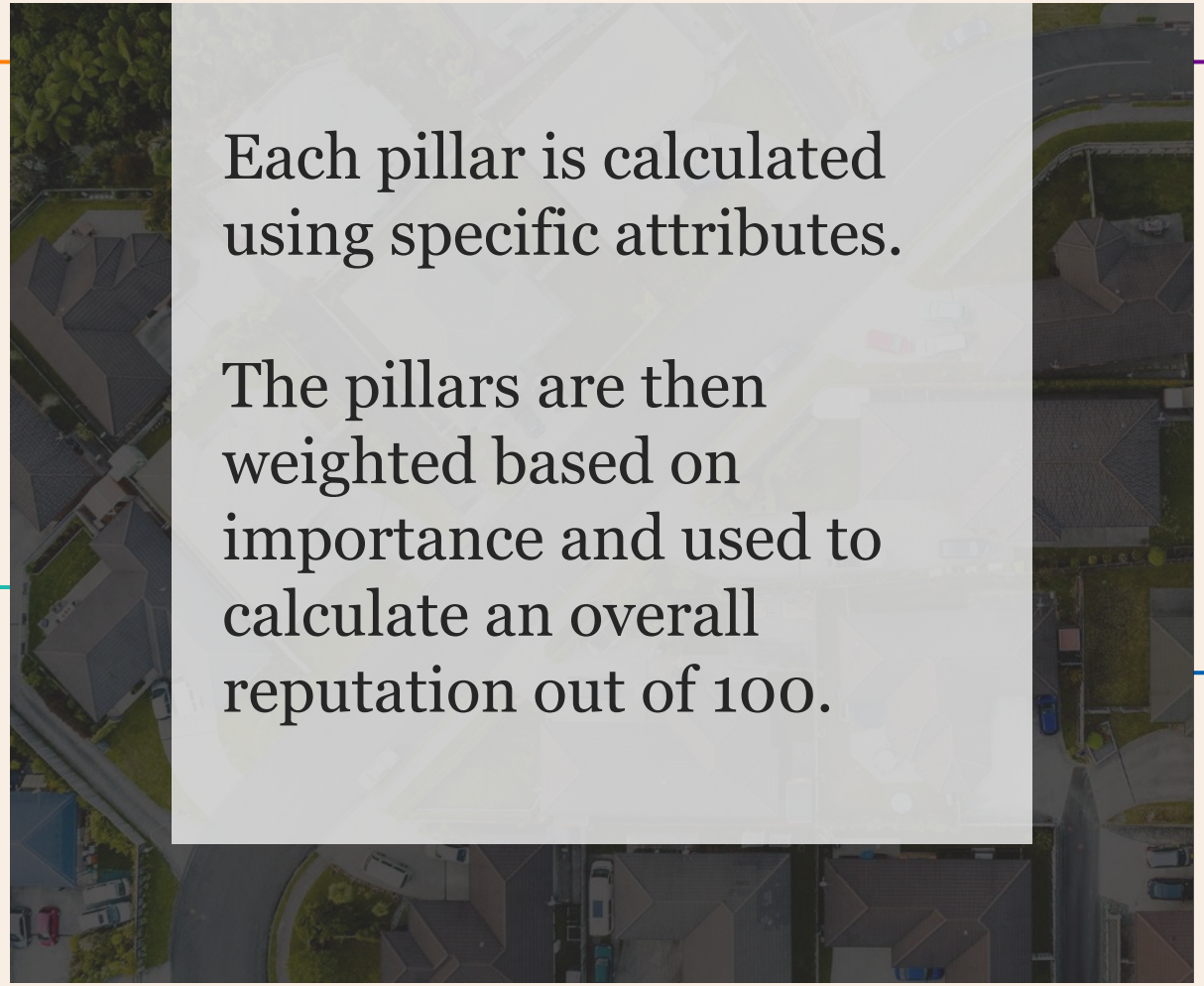
We assess reputation across the public sector using four pillars.

Trust

- Listens to the public's point of view
- Uses ratepayer money responsibly
- Is trustworthy
- Can be relied upon to protect individuals' personal information
- Has the best of intentions

Leadership

- Is a forward-looking organisation
- Contributes to economic growth
- Is easy to deal with in a digital environment
- Is a successful and well-run organisation



Each pillar is calculated using specific attributes.

The pillars are then weighted based on importance and used to calculate an overall reputation out of 100.

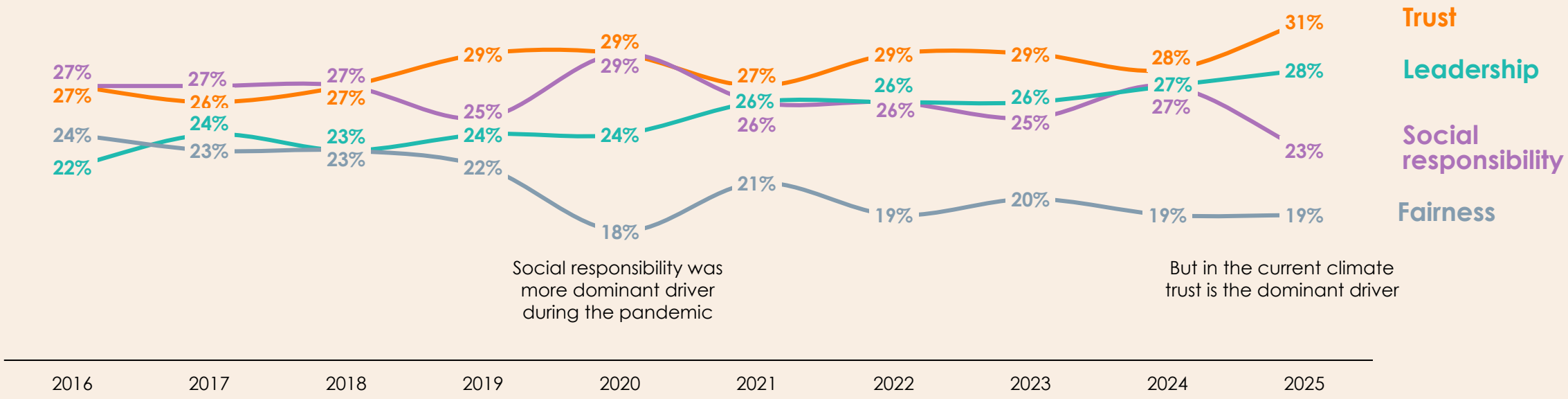
Social responsibility

- Behaves in a responsible way towards the environment
- Is a positive influence on society
- Has a positive impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing
- Helps people make a worthwhile contribution to society
- Protects our environment for future generations

Fairness

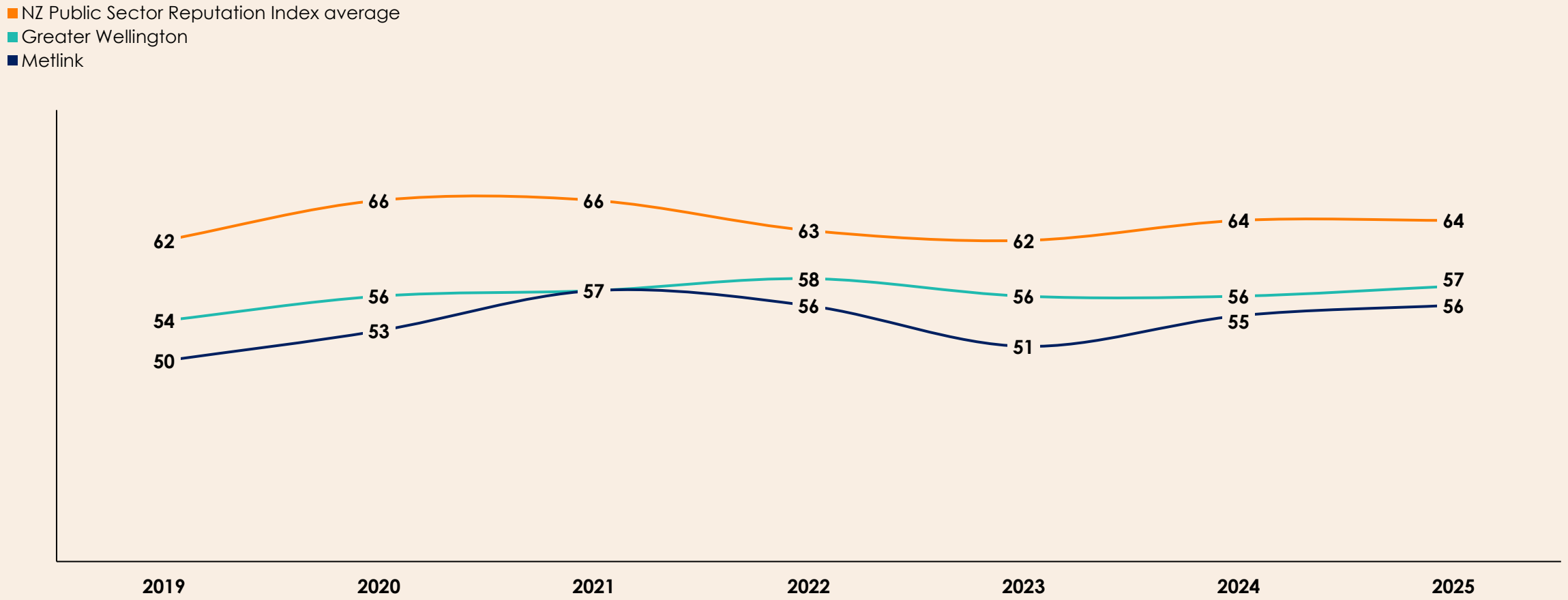
- Treats their employees well
- Deals fairly with people regardless of their background or role
- Works positively with Māori

This year trust has become an increasingly dominant driver of reputation for public sector agencies.



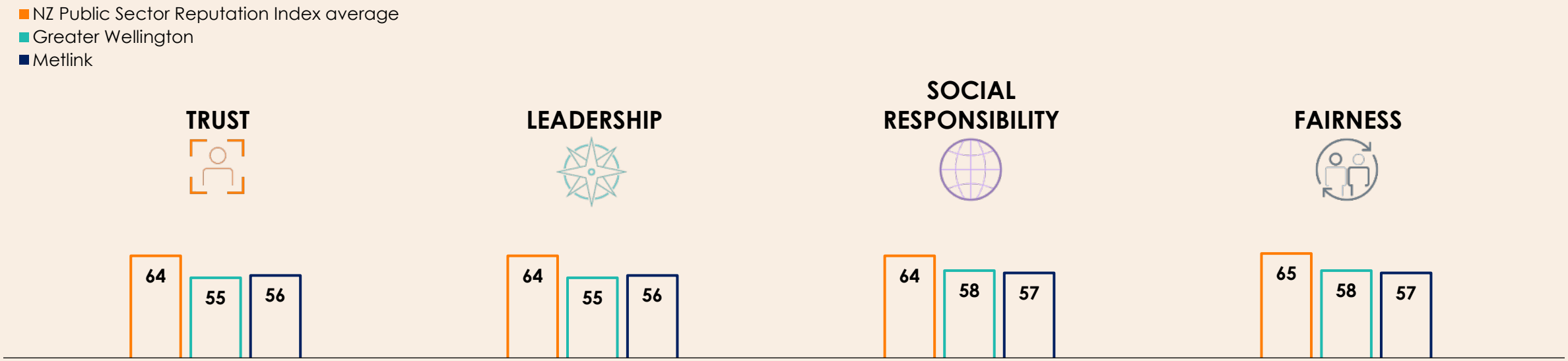
Importance to reputation, expressed as a percentage

In 2025, the overall reputation of both Greater Wellington and Metlink has increased by 1-point.



Source: D1, D4
Base: All residents (n≈1,000 per year).
Note: For more information on our Public Sector Reputation Index, see: www.veriangroup.com/en-nz/news-and-insights/public-sector-reputation-index-nz

The uptick in overall reputation for both organisations is being driven by improvements in Trust and Leadership.



- Listens to the public's point of view
- Uses ratepayer money responsibly
- Is trustworthy
- Can be relied upon to protect individuals' personal information
- Has the best of intentions

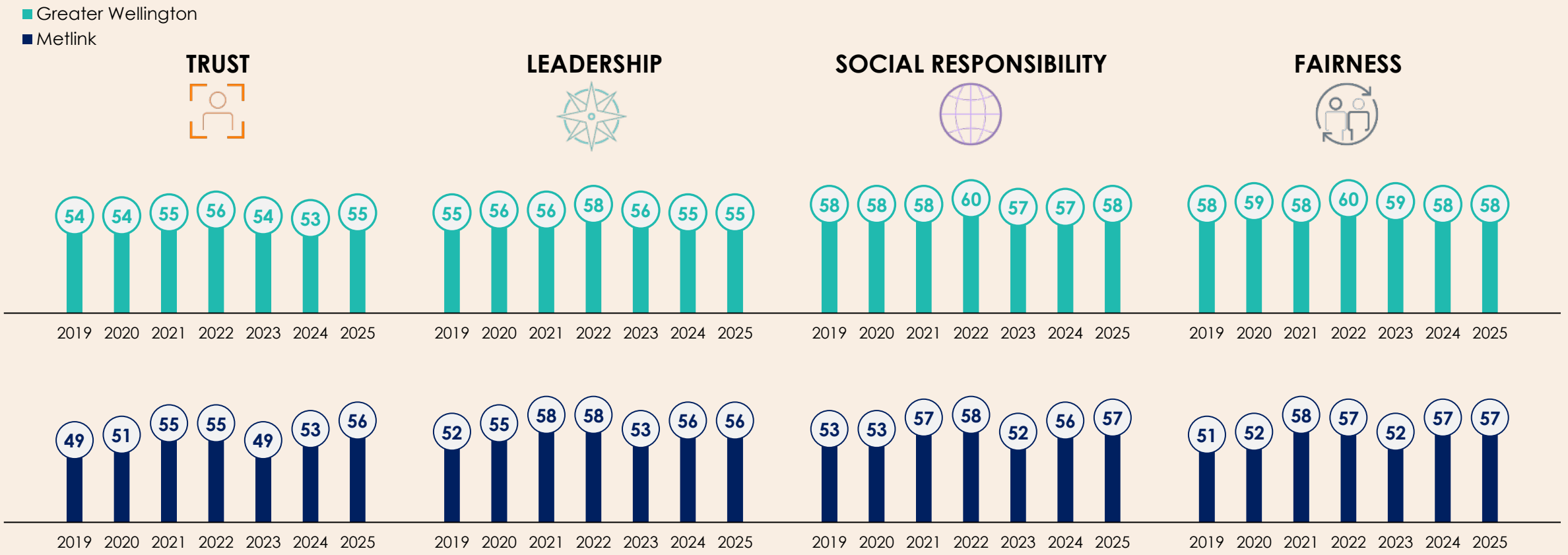
- Is a forward looking organisation
- Contributes to economic growth
- Is easy to deal with in a digital environment
- Is a successful and well-run organisation

- Behaves in a responsible way towards the environment
- Is a positive influence on society
- Has a positive impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing
- Helps people make a worthwhile contribution to society
- Protects our environment for future generations

- Treats their employees well
- Deals fairly with people regardless of their background or role
- Works proactively with Māori

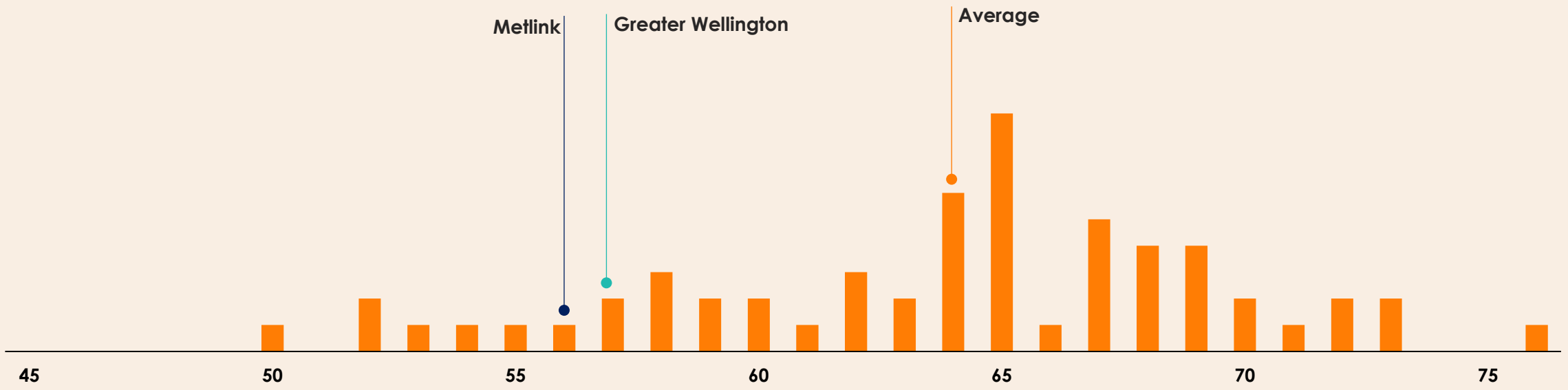
Source: D1, D4
Base: All residents (n≈1,000 per year).
Note: For more information on our Public Sector Reputation Index, see: www.veriangroup.com/en-nz/news-and-insights/public-sector-reputation-index-nz

Over the past two years, Metlink has regained ground across all four pillars, while Greater Wellington has shown to be more consistent.



Source: D1, D4
Base: All residents (n≈1,000 per year).
Note: For more information on our Public Sector Reputation Index, see: www.veriangroup.com/en-nz/news-and-insights/public-sector-reputation-index-nz

Though the reputations of Greater Wellington and Metlink are strengthening, there is still a way to go.



Source: D1, D4
Base: All residents (n≈1,000 per year).
Note: For more information on our Public Sector Reputation Index, see: www.veriangroup.com/en-nz/news-and-insights/public-sector-reputation-index-nz

Awareness and familiarity

Greater Wellington and Metlink have strong brand awareness.

Very few residents say they are unaware of Greater Wellington and/or Metlink.

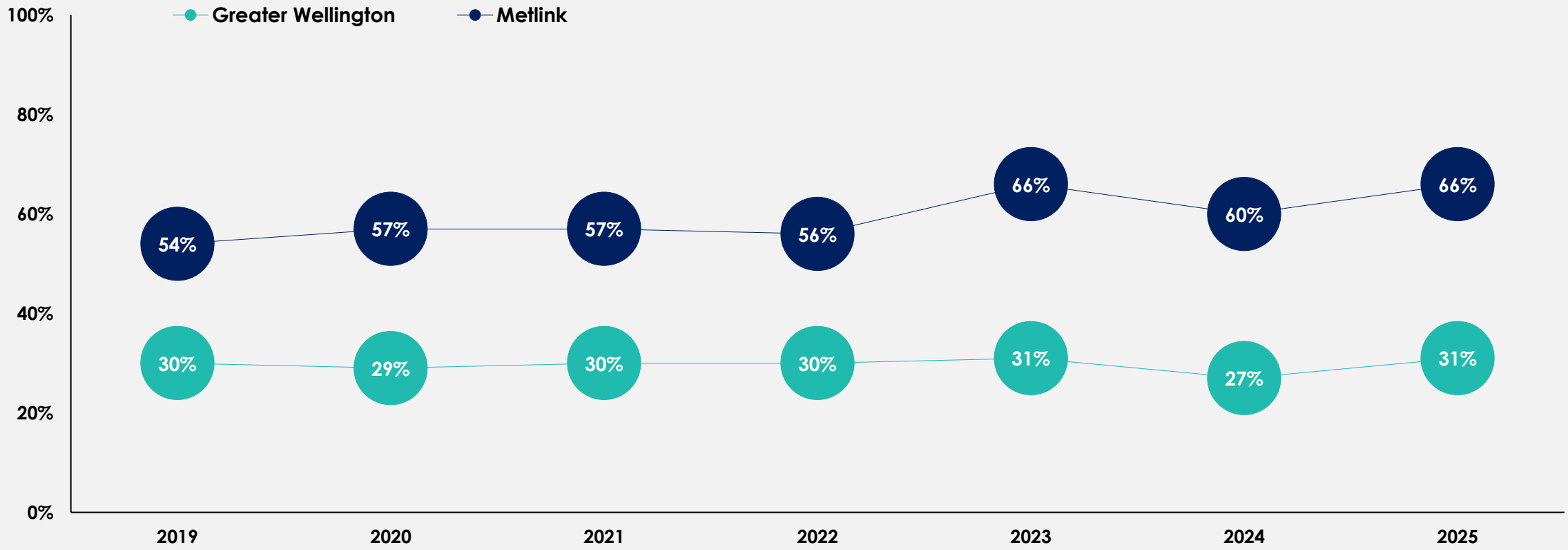
95%

95%

Source: B1a
Base: All residents (n≈1,000)

Familiarity with both Greater Wellington and Metlink continues to improve.

The number of people who say they have a good understanding of what Greater Wellington and Metlink do is recovering well after the dip seen in 2024.

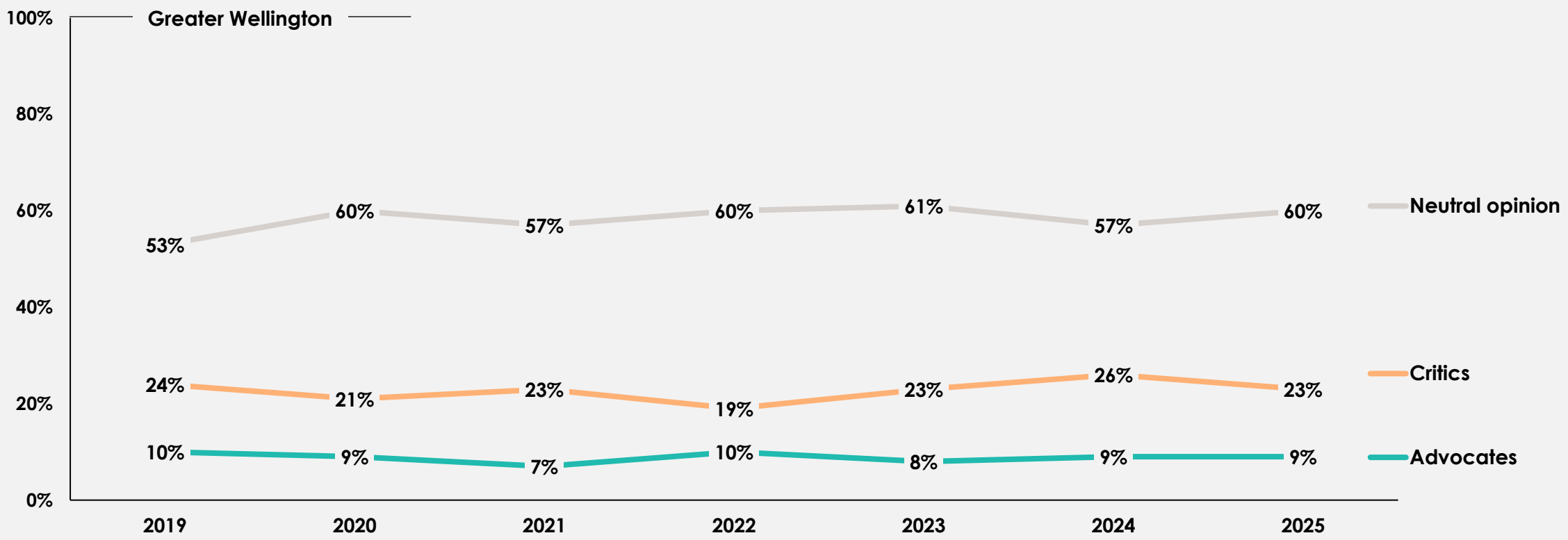


Source: B1, B2
Base: All residents (n≈1,000 per year).

Advocacy

Advocacy for Greater Wellington is steady, while criticism appears to be easing.

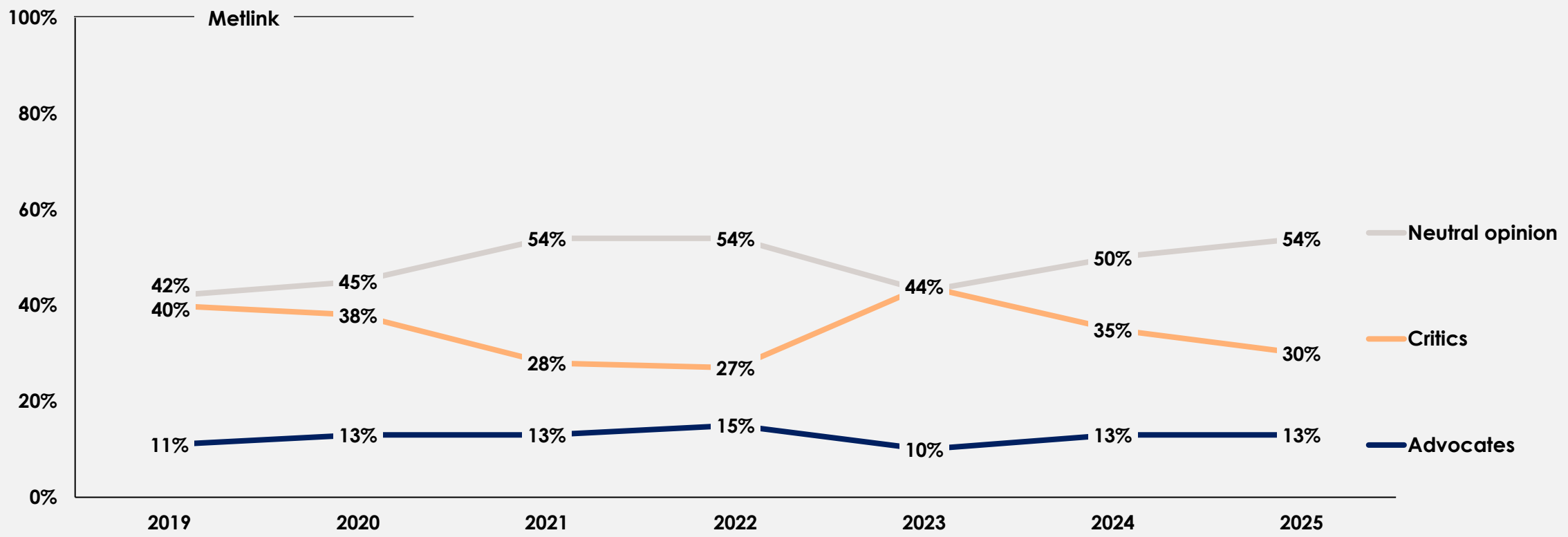
Most residents continue to hold relatively neutral views of Greater Wellington.



Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Don't knows are not shown in chart

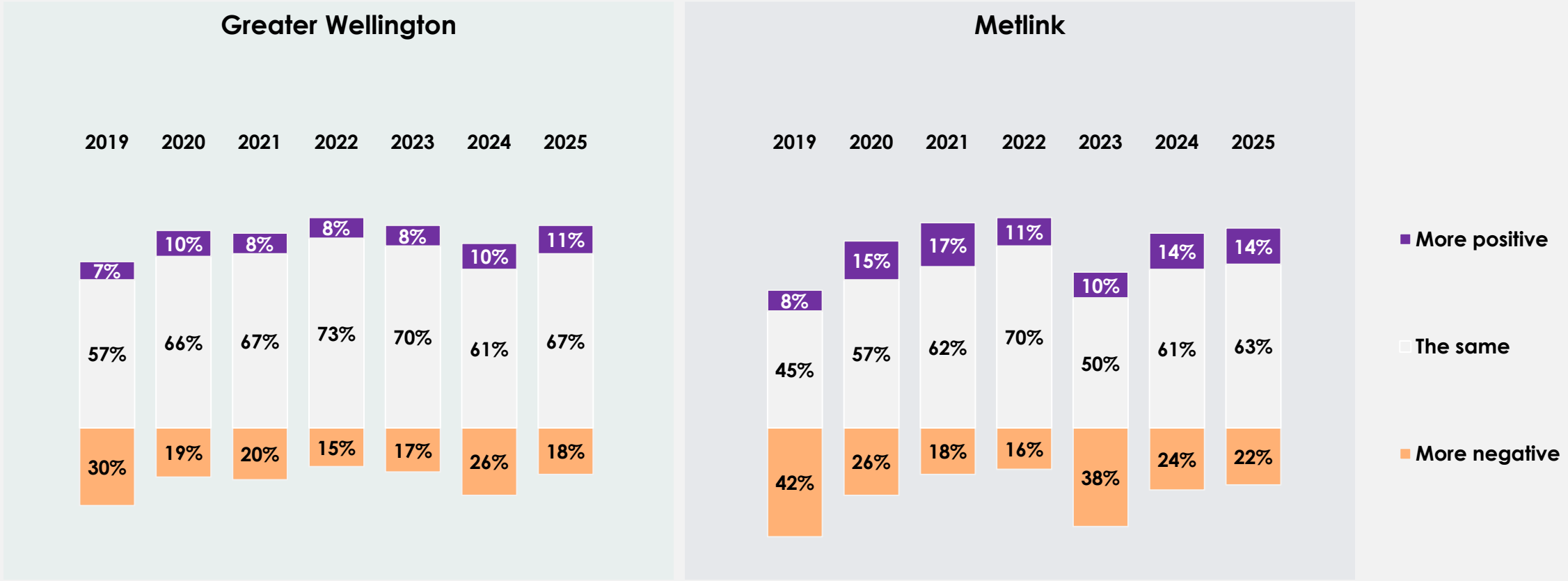
Metlink has recovered well following heightened criticism in 2023.

Although advocacy levels remain consistent and resident sentiment is shifting toward neutrality.



Source: C3
Base: All aware of Metlink (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Don't knows are not shown in chart

We asked residents directly how their opinions of Greater Wellington and Metlink have changed over the past year. Consistent with the previous two slides, negative sentiment appears to be declining.



Source: C2, C4
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington/Metlink (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Don't knows are not shown in chart

To understand what has contributed to improved perceptions of Greater Wellington, among those who feel more positively now than they did a year ago, we asked residents to share their views.

The most common responses highlighted good environmental management and improvements to water infrastructure. Many also mentioned improved communications and visible progress on ongoing projects.

Source: D3b. Earlier, you said that you feel more positively towards Greater Wellington Regional Council now than you did 12 months ago. For what reasons do you feel more positively?
Base: All residents who feel more positively now than they did 12 months ago (n=110)
Note: The size of a word indicates the frequency it was mentioned

The following comments from residents help illustrate these key themes.

Environmental management

"They've launched more environmental projects that benefit local communities. Their communication has improved, keeping us better informed."

"I have been walking in the regional parks and can see the work they are doing to look after the environment."

Better communication

"Their communication has improved, keeping us better informed."

"Communication has got better, timelier and in plain English."

Good work

"They are doing a great job."

"Having to work in a tough political and economic climate - doing more with less"

Water infrastructure

"Moving forward to fix the water pipes and infrastructure."

"There appears to be a more positive attitude towards getting our water problems sorted."

Projects

"Seeing positive projects they've shared via Facebook."

"Greater visibility of their projects and what they're doing in the region."

Improvements

"I feel particularly satisfied because of the improved public transport network, optimized routes and improved service quality."

"I've witnessed that they're made lots of improvements for the city and put everything on place."

Source: D3b

We also asked residents who feel more negatively now, than they did a year ago, to share their views.

Money management was the most frequently mentioned concern. This was followed by comments about public transport and water infrastructure. Many also expressed general dissatisfaction with a lack of improvements.

Source: D3a. Earlier, you said that you feel more negatively towards Greater Wellington Regional Council now than you did 12 months ago. For what reasons do you feel more negatively?
Base: All residents who feel more negatively now than they did 12 months ago (n=140)
Note: The size of a word indicates the frequency it was mentioned

The following comments from residents help illustrate these key themes.

Money mismanagement

"Overspend, asking for consultation but not taking on board feedback, not putting money where it should go."

"Some of their priorities are not supported by the biggest groups of ratepayers."

"Continued increase in spending with no regards for affordability."

Water issues

"The news about the mismanagement of Wellington's water project."

"The water problems in Wellington are worse than ever."

"Their water policies for the region are shortsighted and destructive."

Public transport

"Poor public transportation service but higher fees."

"Because they are doing a rubbish job at sorting the dysfunctional Wairarapa train lines and not being not that great at communicating with the South Wairarapa and Wairarapa communities or assisting with the trains."

"Poor public transport. Wellington is not the city it used to be."

No improvements

"Slow response to environmental issues. The council seems to be dragging its feet on addressing pressing environmental concerns like water pollution in the region. Despite knowing about the issues for a while, there haven't been significant and timely actions taken to improve the situation, which is really disappointing."

Source: D3a

When asked why they felt more positively about Metlink compared to 12 months ago, respondents commonly pointed to improvements in bus services, and to a lesser extent, train services. They noted greater reliability and increased frequency as key reasons for their improved perceptions.

Source: D6b. Earlier, you said that you feel more positively towards Metlink now than you did 12 months ago. For what reasons do you feel more positively?
Base: All residents who feel more positively now than they did 12 months ago (n=156)
Note: The size of a word indicates the frequency it was mentioned

The following comments from residents help illustrate these key themes.

Buses

"The bus services are better, use to always be cancelled or just not show up. Have not had an issue with them in the last 8 months or so."

"They have improved the bus service to my area with a more regular #4 route."

"Their buses are more punctual, and the routes are more convenient. The customer service has improved a lot, always friendly and helpful."

Reliable

"Their bus services are now a lot more reliable and the Metlink phone app is excellent."

"Bus services that I use have become more reliable, mostly the high frequency ones."

"Increased reliability of bus and train services."

Trains

"I think that Metlink has been developing the train network better and improved the service. Metlink has built additional parking infrastructure. The trains seem to run really well.."

"Trains are mostly running to timetable now."

"The service is more frequent, and my bus connects with the train so shorter waiting time especially helpful when the weather is bad."

Frequency

"There are regular buses and trains which makes getting across town very easy, well done, and I should know as I was a poor student plus full-time worker the last three years and relied on buses and trains to get me from either Kāpiti or Hutt to get to the airport and back with luggage about 10 times to Auckland to study."

"They appear to have more bus drivers now, so bus timetable is more reliable and buses more frequent."

Source: D6b

Residents who now feel more negatively about Metlink than they did a year ago talked about ongoing issues with train services and concerns about high fares.

Source: D6a. Earlier, you said that you feel more negatively towards Metlink now than you did 12 months ago. For what reasons do you feel more negatively?
Base: All residents who feel more negatively now than they did 12 months ago (n=183)
Note: The size of a word indicates the frequency it was mentioned

The following comments from residents help illustrate these key themes.

Trains

"Train performance/efficiency has declined through poor track maintenance and multiple signal faults."

"The continuing debacle of the Wairarapa train line - which keeps going as well as it does largely through the contribution of staff, not because of the actions of management."

"The mucking around with the cancellations of trains on Kāpiti line during peak hours."

Buses

"They keep cancelling buses, providing no alternative, changing routes that don't link."

"We are so poorly serviced by Metlink at our house that it's generally a waste of time even trying to get a bus."

"Unreliable transportation service, more expensive, unfriendly service from bus drivers."

Expensive price increases

"Services are always delayed. They don't know how to deal with big events at the stadium. Staff are rude and unapproachable. Prices are ridiculously expensive."

"More expensive to use buses now. I'm not as likely to use buses due to cost. Buses are sometimes early so I miss them and end up Ubering."

"Trains are far more unreliable, and fares have gone up. We are paying more for a worse service."

Unreliable

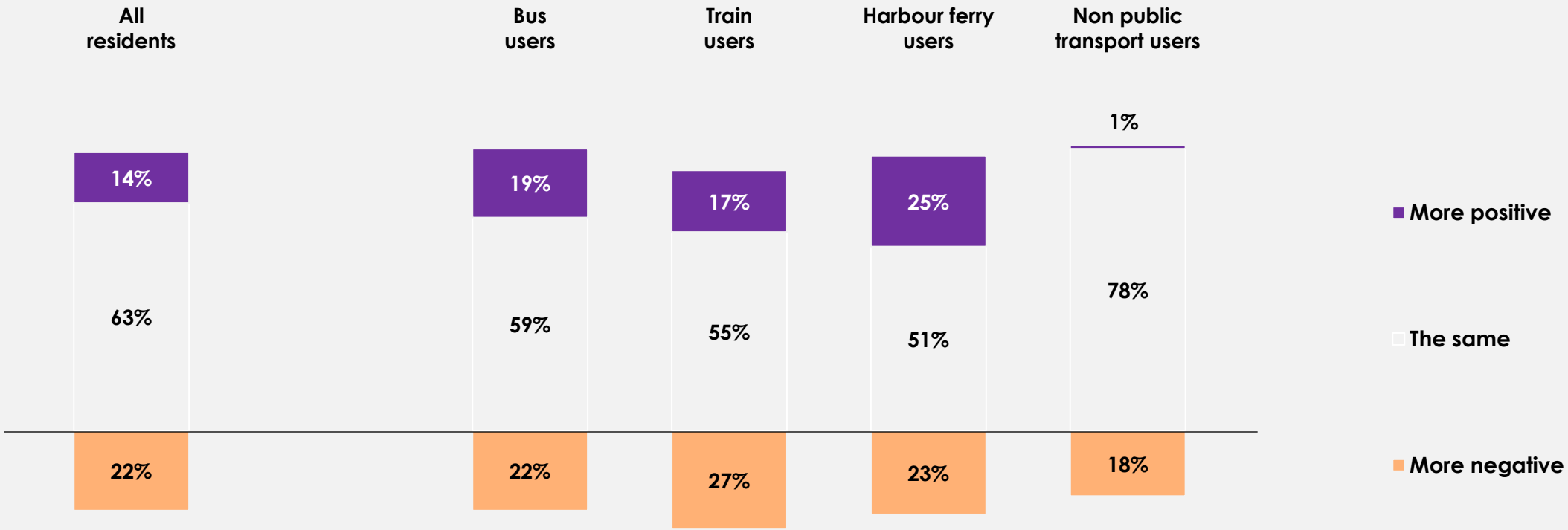
"Constant network interruptions and issues, cannot be relied upon for on time public transport. Trains/buses are always late. The price to use to commute is sizeable and expensive given the poor service received in return."

"Their train service from Wairarapa to wellington, which is so important, has been shocking, late/no trains at all very unreliable and lacking in information to users."

Source: D6a

Dissatisfaction with our region's trains is also evident when we look at perception changes across the different transport users.

Train users are more likely to report a decline in their opinion of Metlink over the past year compared to bus users, ferry users, and non-users.

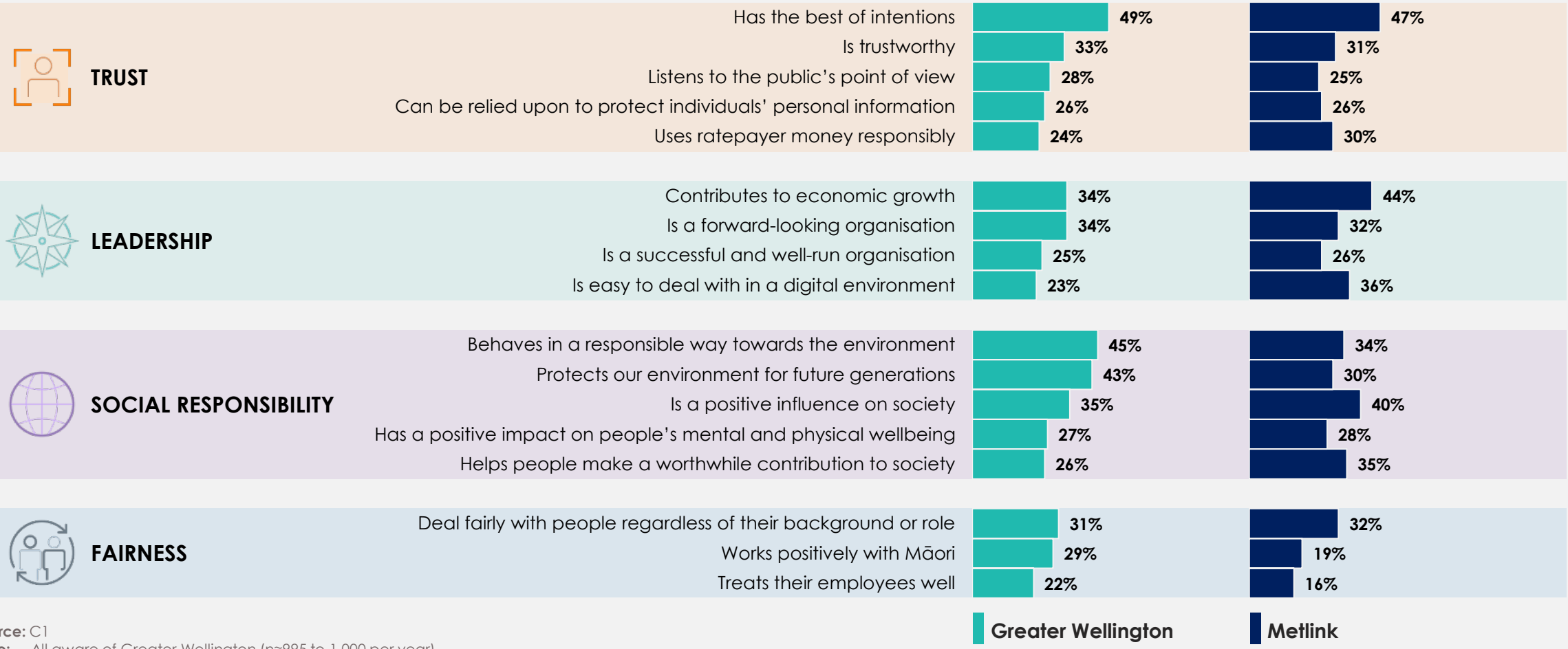


Source: C4
Base: All aware of Metlink (n=996), Bus users (n=604), Train users (n=605), Ferry users (n=97), Non public transport users (n=212).
Note: Don't knows are not shown in chart

Perceptions and sentiment

Looking first at the perceptions that feed into the pillars of reputation; residents are most positive about the good intentions of Greater Wellington and Metlink.

Greater Wellington is viewed as a responsible guardian of the environment, while Metlink is seen to contribute positively to the economy and have a positive influence on society.



Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)

Looking at perceptions of engagement and impact, residents strongly believe that the work done by Greater Wellington and Metlink is important.

Metlink, in particular, is seen as relatively good at keeping people informed and making a meaningful impact on residents.

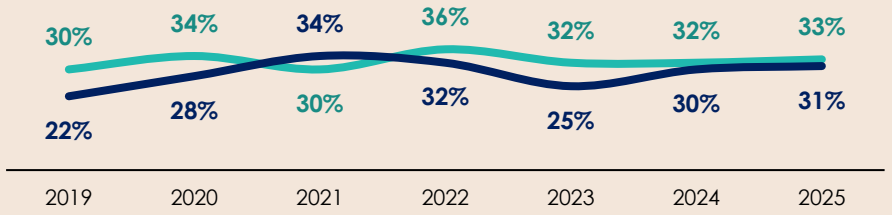
Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)

Since the research began in 2019, both Greater Wellington and Metlink have made gradual (although at times wavering) progress in building trust with residents.

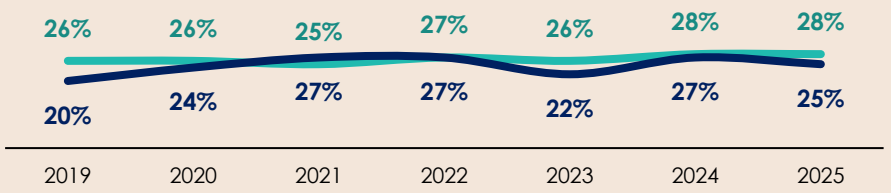
One area that has shown a downturn in 2025 is perceptions around the protection of personal information.

TRUST

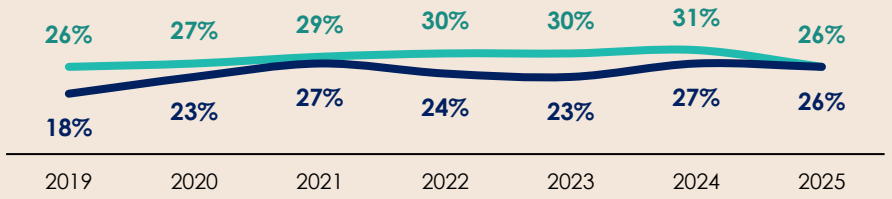
Is trustworthy



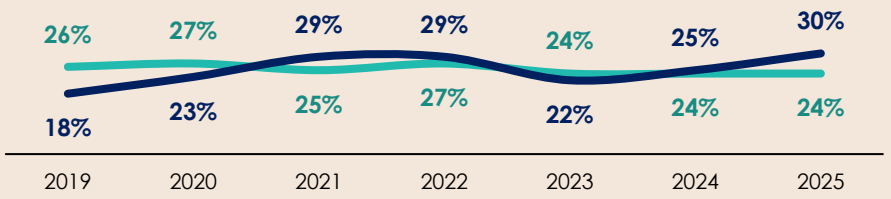
Listens to the public's point of view



Can be relied upon to protect individuals' personal information



Uses ratepayer money responsibly



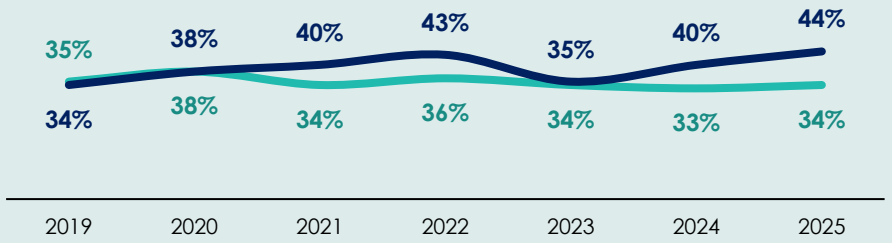
Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Attributes without established annual trend data are not included in these charts

Greater Wellington's leadership perceptions have been very consistent over the course of the research. Comparatively, Metlink's leadership perceptions show more variability.

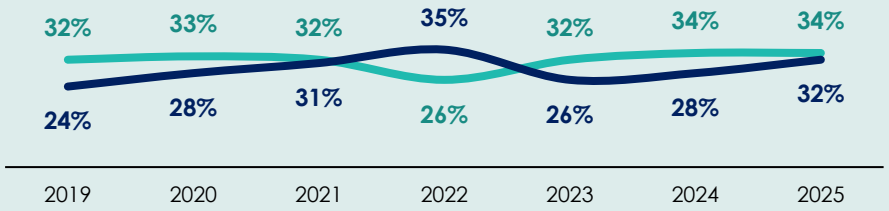
This year, Metlink is seen to be doing an better job of contributing to economic growth, and demonstrating that it is a forward looking organisation. However, perceptions around Metlink being digitally accessible are down.

LEADERSHIP

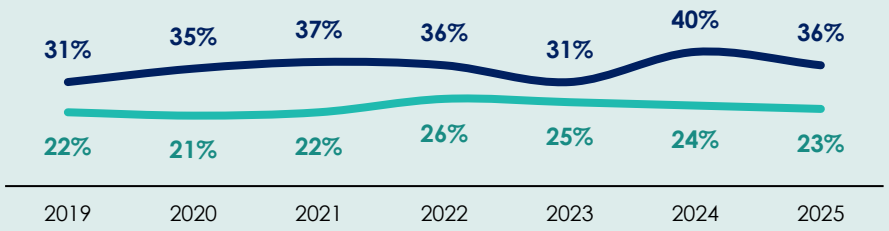
Contributes to economic growth



Is a forward looking organisation



Is easy to deal with in a digital environment



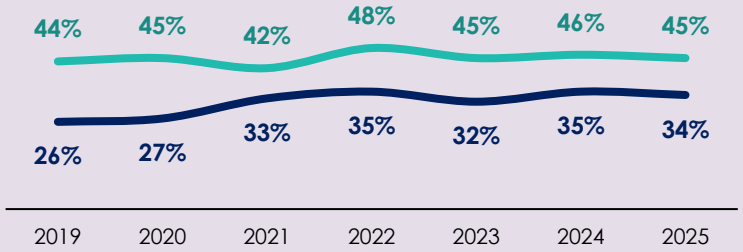
Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Attributes without established annual trend data are not included in these charts

Greater Wellington have consistently rated well when it comes to environmental protection, Metlink on the other hand is slowly gaining public recognition in this area.

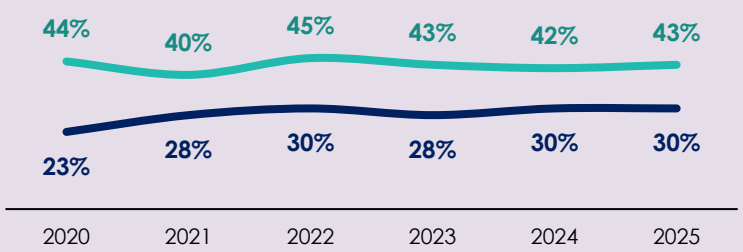
Additionally, this year, residents are increasingly positive about Metlink's social contribution.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

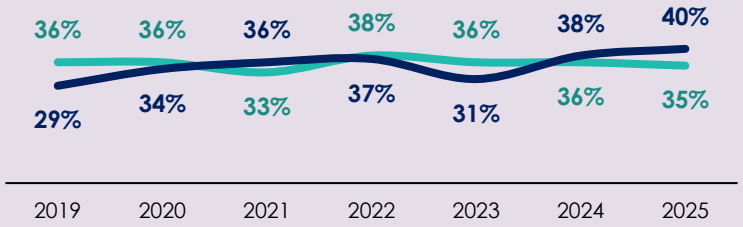
Behaves in a responsible way towards the environment



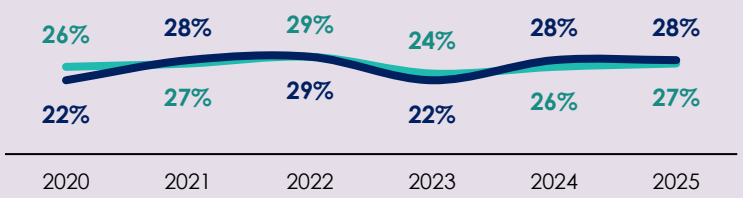
Protects our environment for future generations



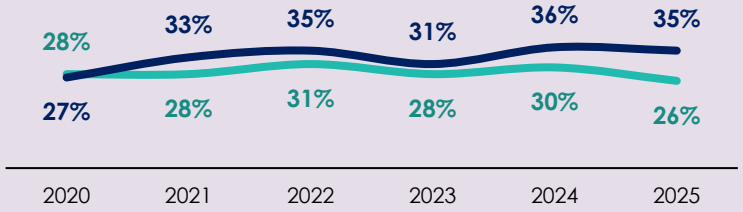
Is a positive influence on society



Has a positive impact of people's wellbeing (mental/physical)



Helps people make a worthwhile contribution to society



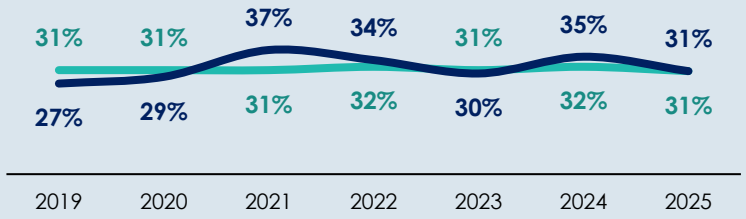
Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Attributes without established annual trend data are not included in these charts

Both Greater Wellington and Metlink have seen slow but steady improvements to perceptions of how they treat staff and how they work with iwi.

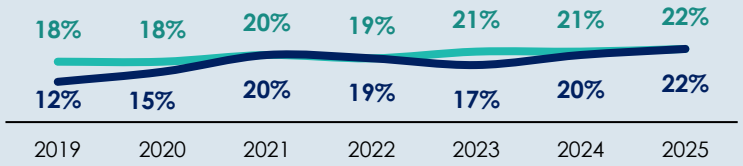
Metlink has also received increasingly positive ratings around keeping people informed, despite a dip in 2023.

FAIRNESS

Deal fairly with people regardless of their background or role

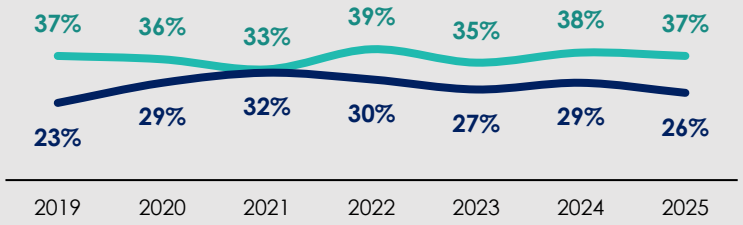


Treats their employees well

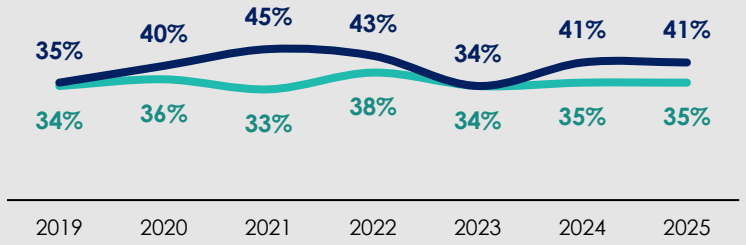


ENGAGEMENT

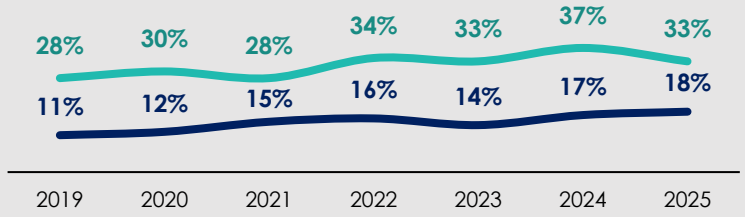
Provides opportunities for people to have their say



Keeps people informed about what it's doing



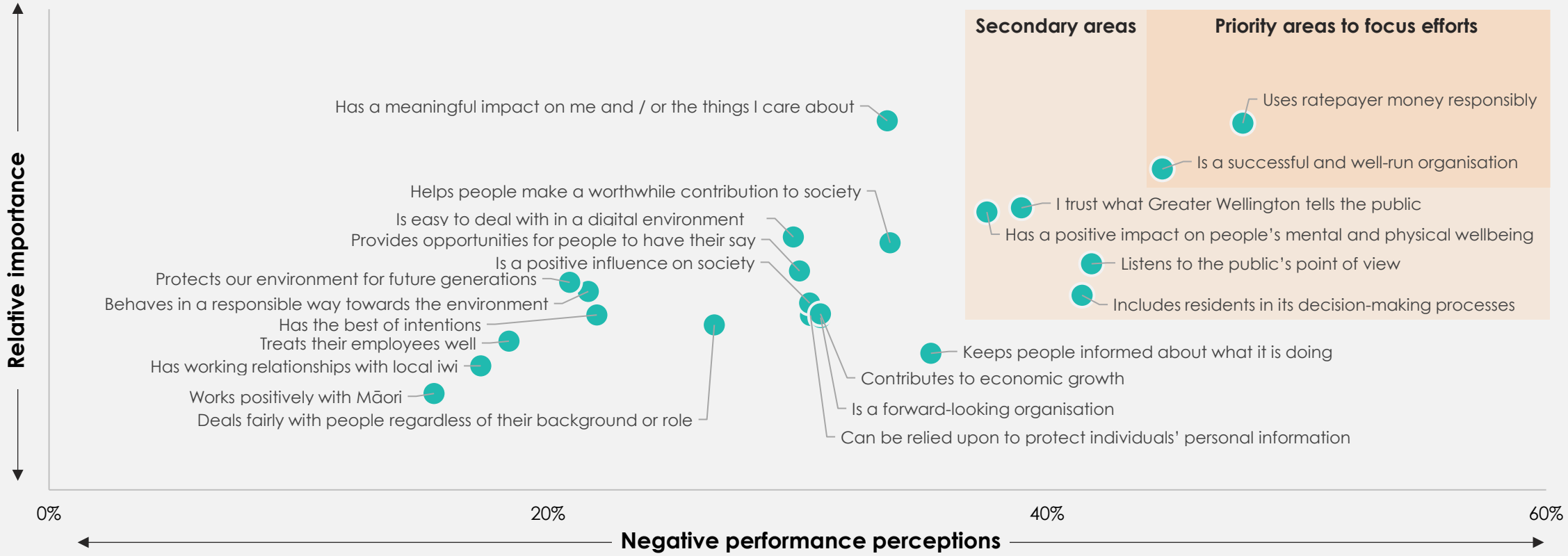
Has working relationships with local iwi



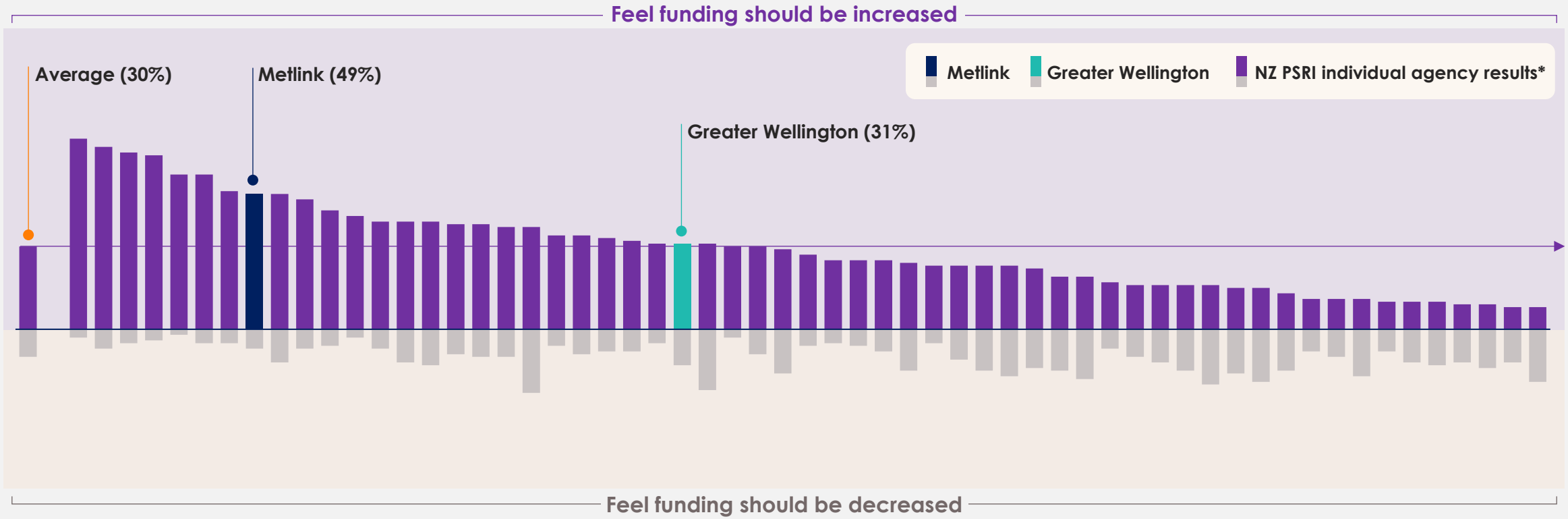
Source: C1
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n≈995 to 1,000 per year)
Note: Attributes without established annual trend data are not included in these charts

Performance-importance analysis was conducted to identify where Greater Wellington would benefit most from concentrated efforts. Two areas emerged as priorities - both are highly influential to overall perceptions but are currently rated lower in performance: using ratepayer money responsibly and being a successful and well-run business.

Secondary areas include: trust in what they tell the public, positively impacting people's wellbeing, listening to the public, and including residents in decision-making.

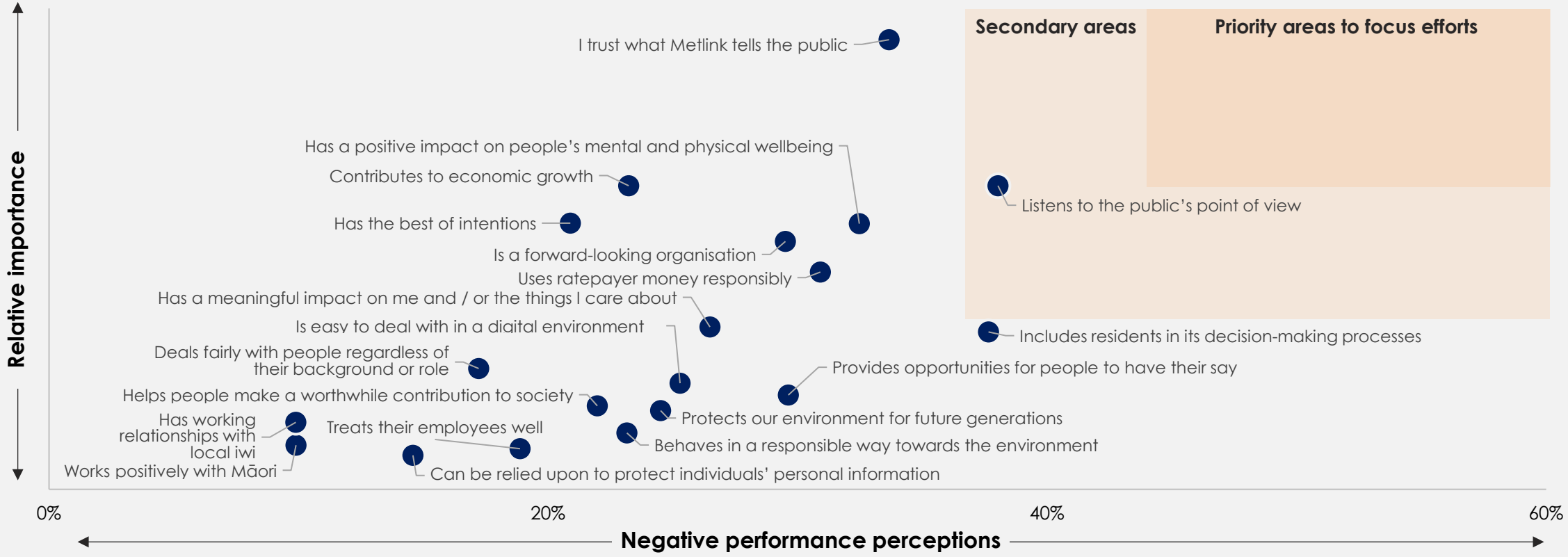


While residents want Greater Wellington to use ratepayer money responsibly, many also believe that both Greater Wellington and Metlink should receive more funding than they currently do.



Source: C6, C8 - Do you think funding for [Greater Wellington Regional Council / Metlink] should be increased, decreased or stay the same?
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington and Metlink (n=991 and 996 respectively)
Note: *Additional lines represent other Government agencies as measured in Verian's Public Sector Reputation Index 2025. Best efforts have been made to ensure comparability between the surveys; however, direct comparisons should be interpreted with caution

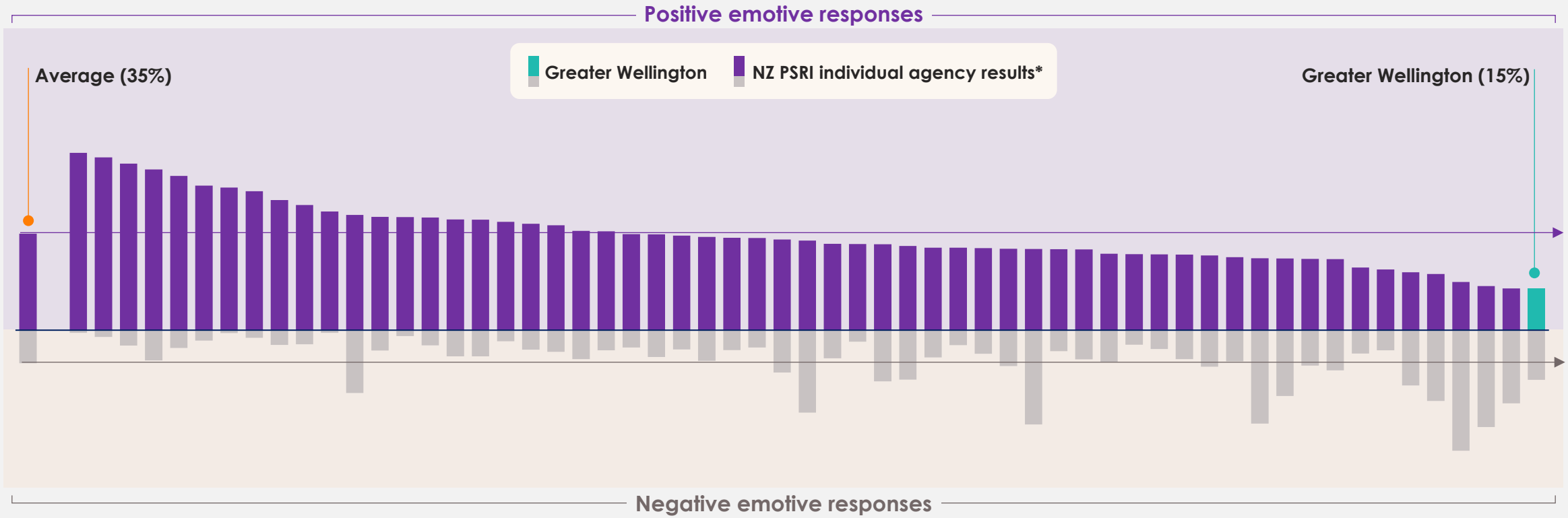
For Metlink, only one area stands out as both highly important and relatively low in performance: listening to the public's point of view.



Emotional resonance

This year, for the first time, we measured residents' emotional connection with Greater Wellington.

Results were mixed - neither strongly positive nor negative, indicating that residents are largely neutral and may be open to efforts from Greater Wellington.



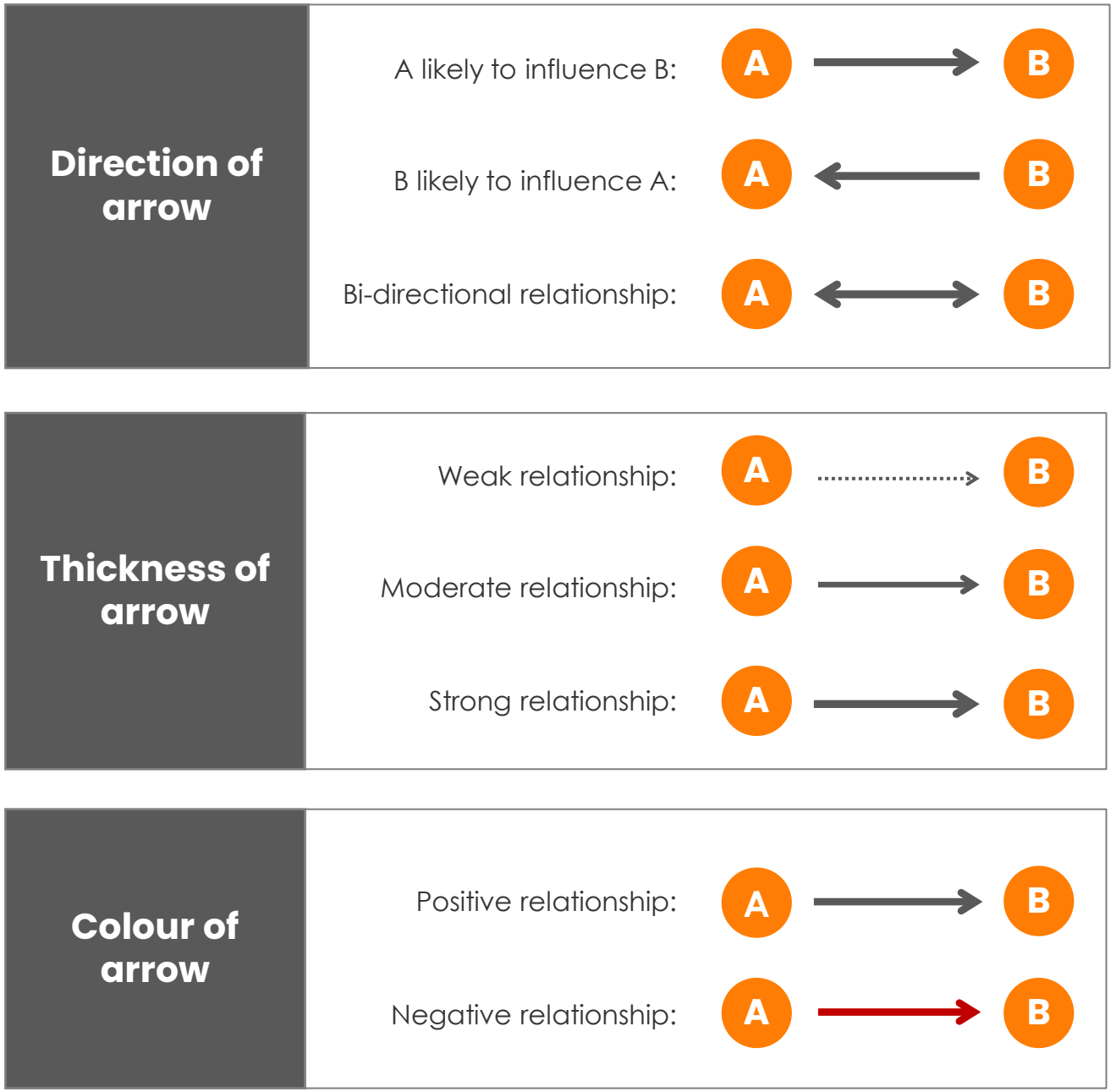
Source: C5, C7 - Please try to answer this next question as quickly as possible. Overall, how to you feel about [Greater Wellington Regional Council / Metlink]?
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n=991)
Note: *Additional lines represent other Government agencies as measured in Verian's Public Sector Reputation Index 2025. Best efforts have been made to ensure comparability between the surveys; however, direct comparisons should be interpreted with caution

How could Greater Wellington strengthen emotional connections?

To dig a little deeper to understand how beliefs interact to impact emotional connection with Greater Wellington, a Bayesian Belief Network analysis was conducted.

Bayesian Belief Networks use a machine learning algorithm to determine the underlying structure of data – how one belief affects another, in what direction, and how powerfully.

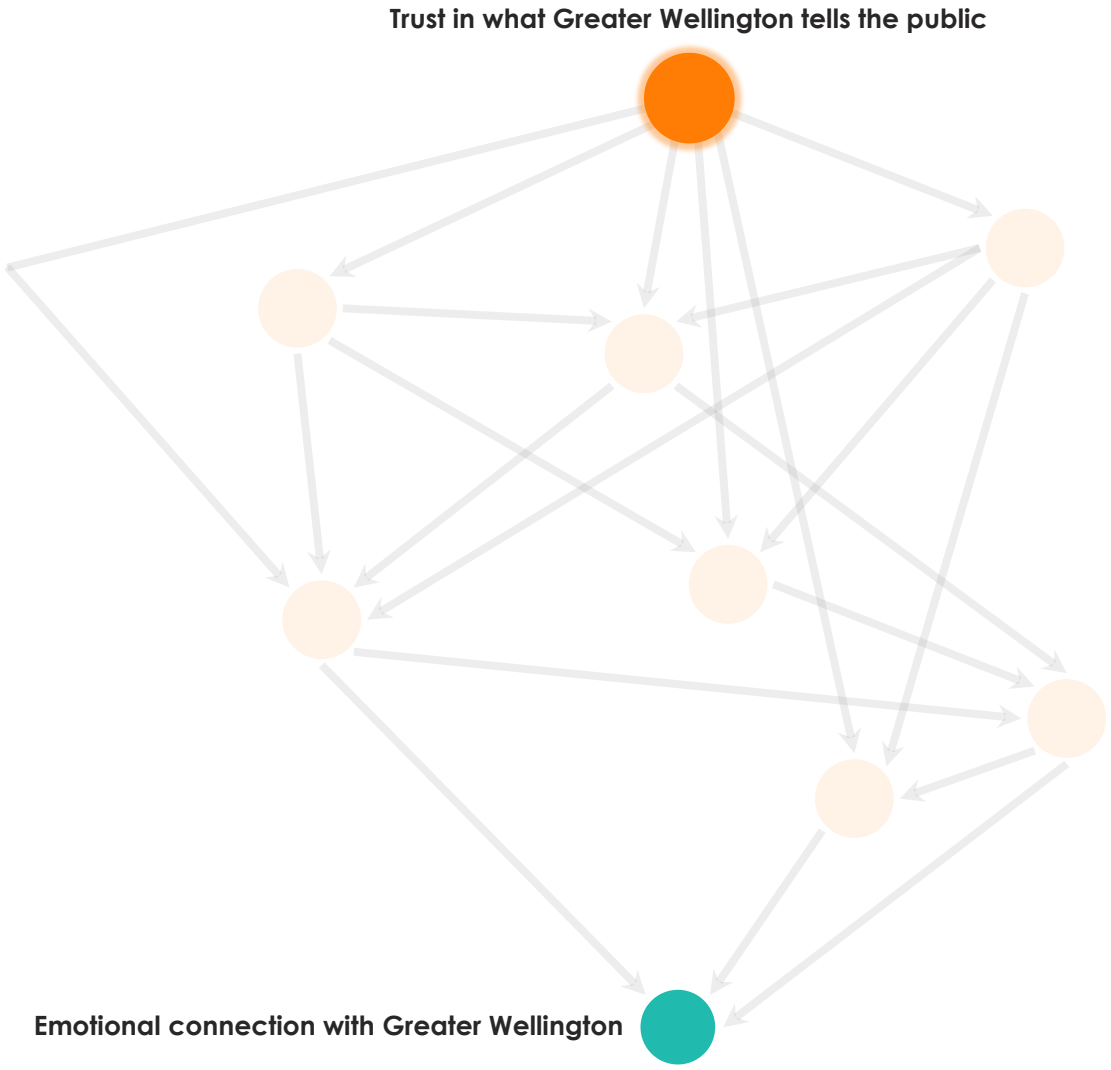
The diagram to the right illustrates how the relationships revealed by the Bayesian Belief Network are depicted in the following slides.



The key take-out from the BBN.

The key insight from the Bayesian Belief Network is that there is one 'root' belief which is not influenced by any other beliefs in the model, this is: trust in what Greater Wellington tell the public.

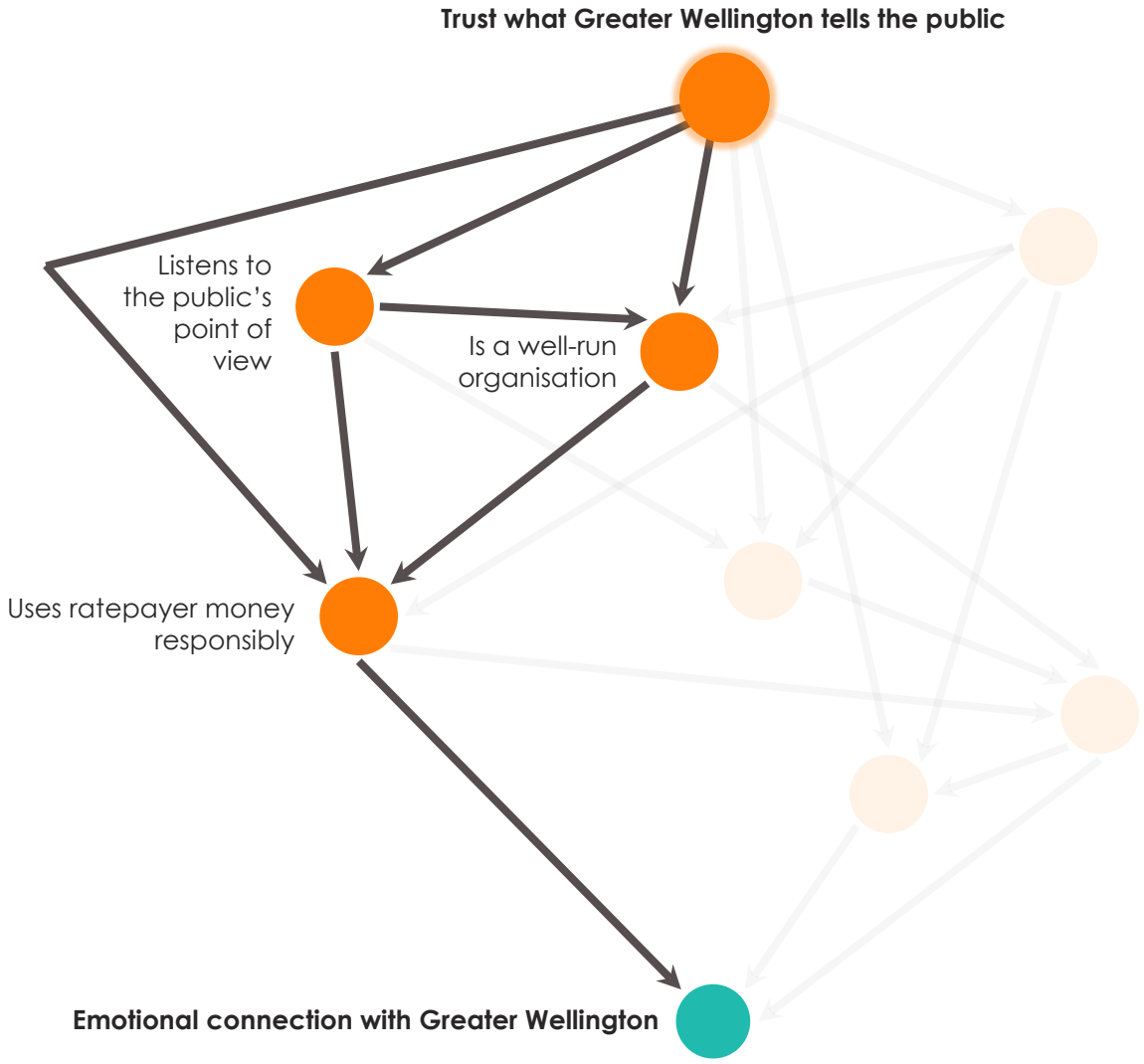
While this 'root' belief isn't the most influential, it does have an important role to play. Its 'super-charges' the other beliefs, amplifying their power. So, addressing this 'root' belief along with the more impactful direct drivers (seen earlier on slide 37) would likely be beneficial to emotional connection with Greater Wellington.



The BBN pathways.

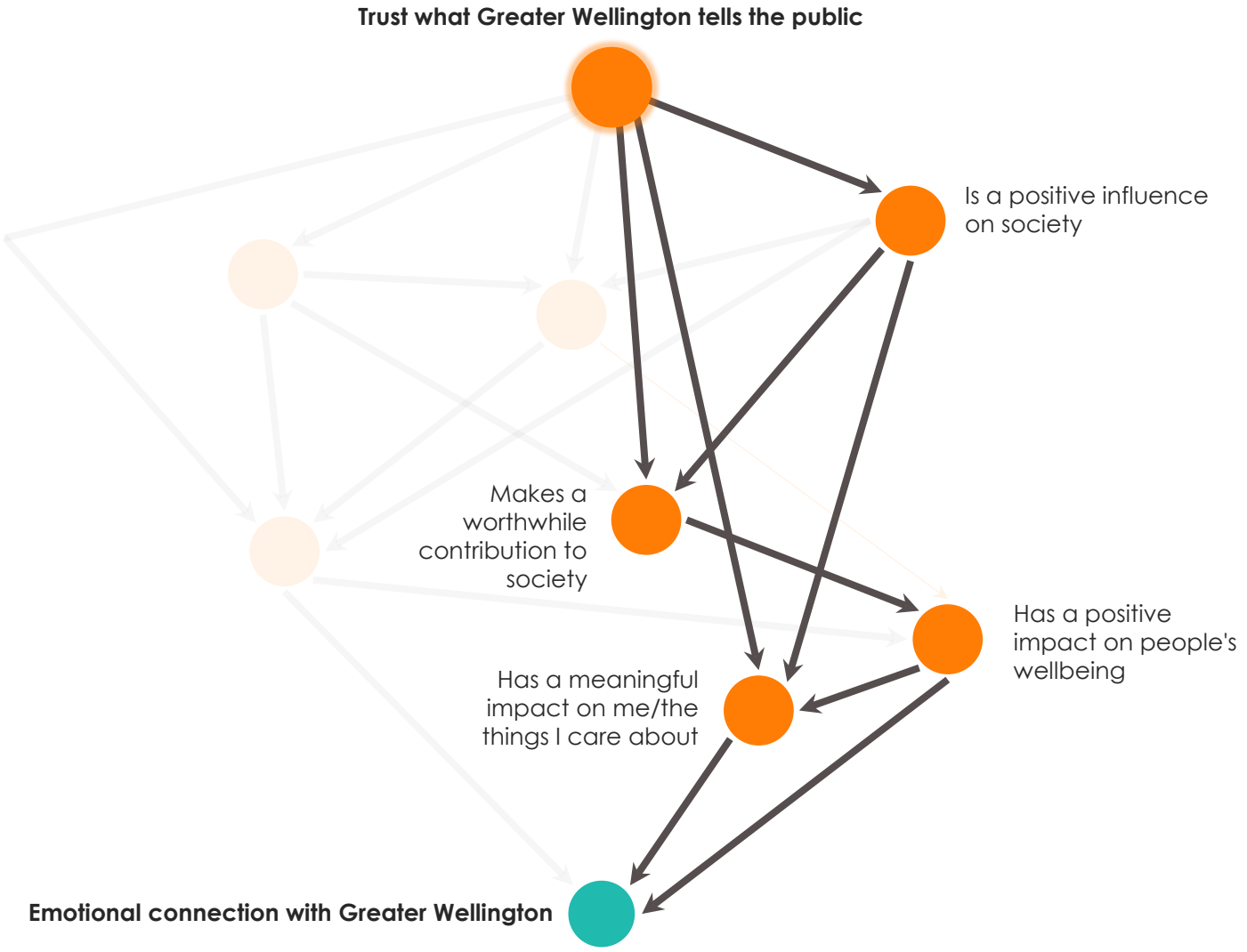
The attributes (beliefs) that we use to measure Greater Wellington's reputation interact heavily, however, there are two distinct pathways through which the root belief influences emotional connection with Greater Wellington.

The first of which, shown to the right, is: Greater Wellington being perceived to be well-run, listening to the public, and using ratepayer money responsibly.



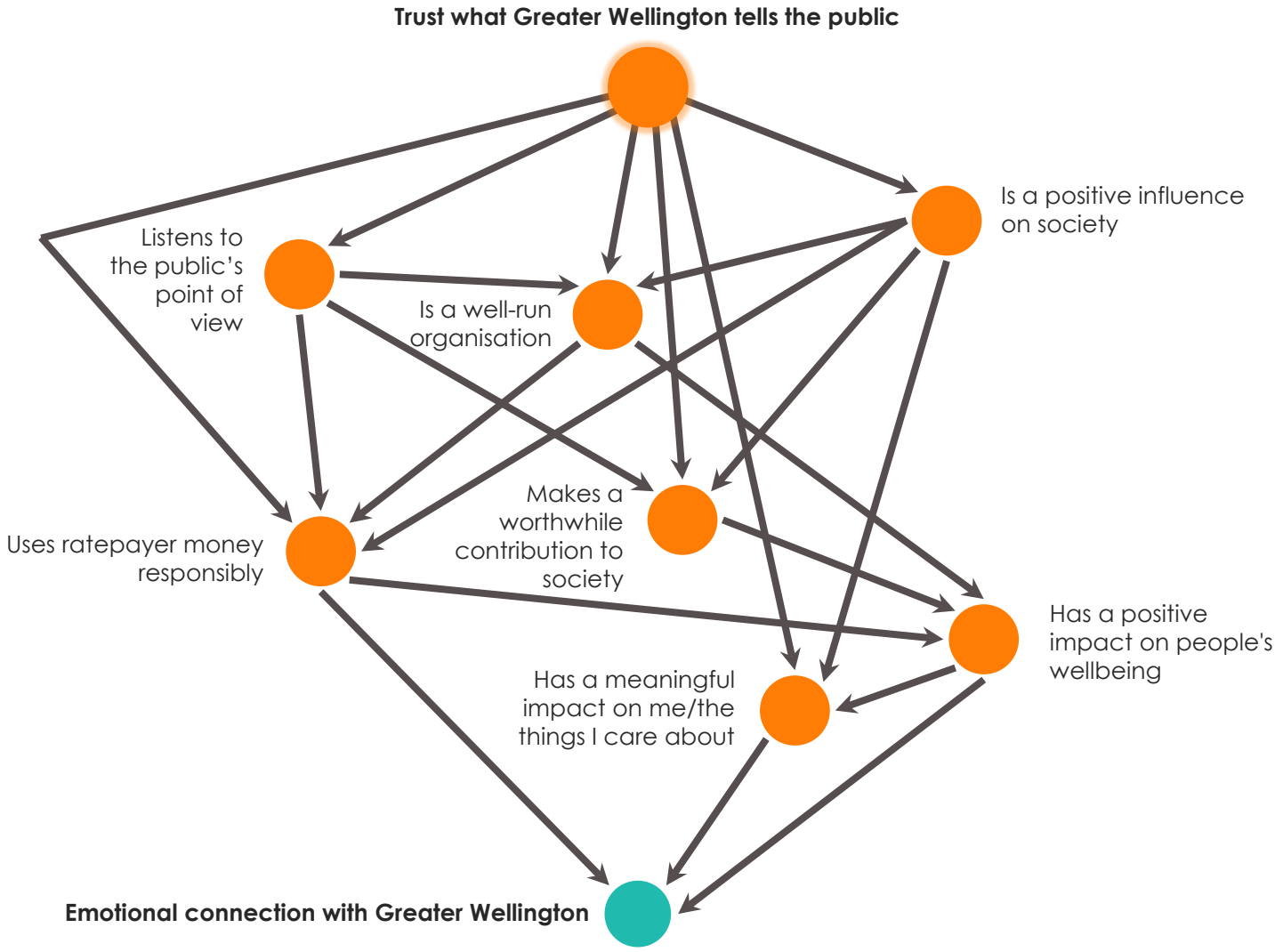
The BBN pathways.

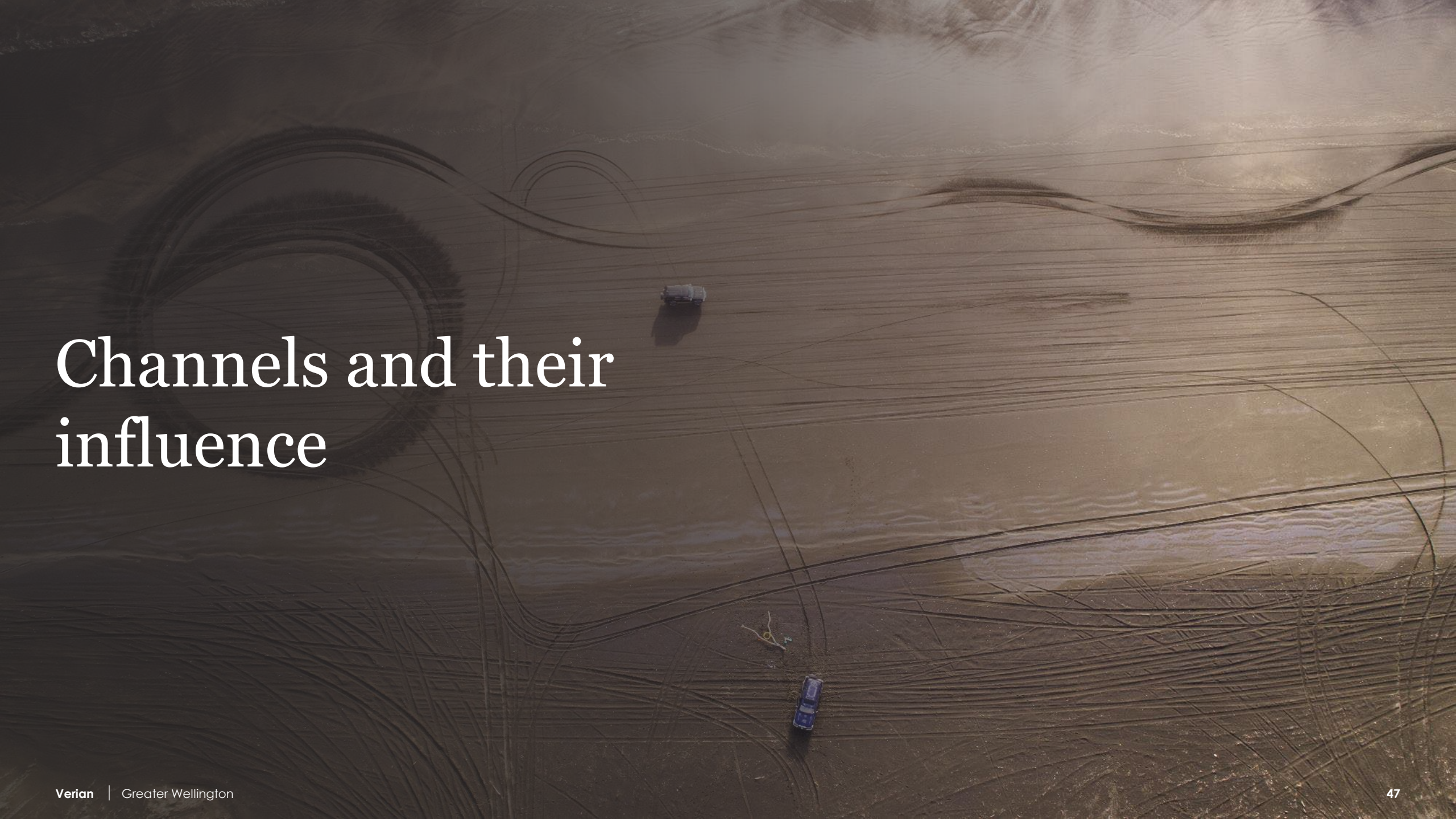
The second is: Greater Wellington's contribution to society and wellbeing.



The overall model.

The overall model to the right illustrates how the root variable and two pathways interact to drive emotional connection with Greater Wellington. The high level of interaction between the beliefs mean that addressing one can have a positive flow-on effect across the network.



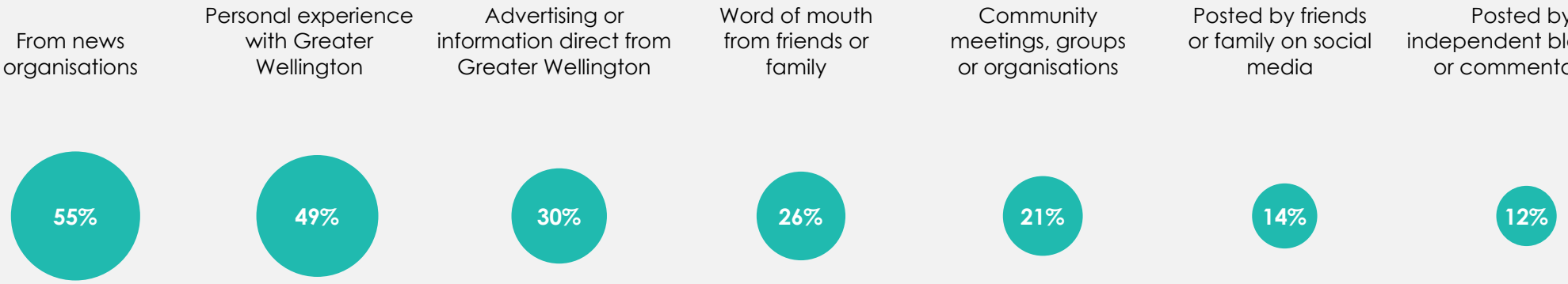


Channels and their influence

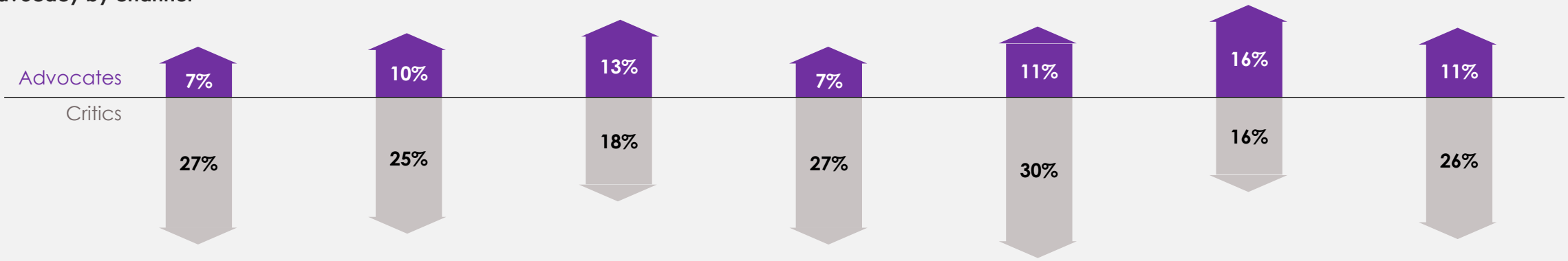
Residents primarily form their perceptions of Greater Wellington through three key channels: news coverage, personal experience, and Greater Wellington's advertising.

Using advocacy as a proxy for channel sentiment, news coverage appears to be negatively impacting perceptions of Greater Wellington. Meanwhile, direct experiences are not as positive as they could be.

Influence channels



Advocacy by channel

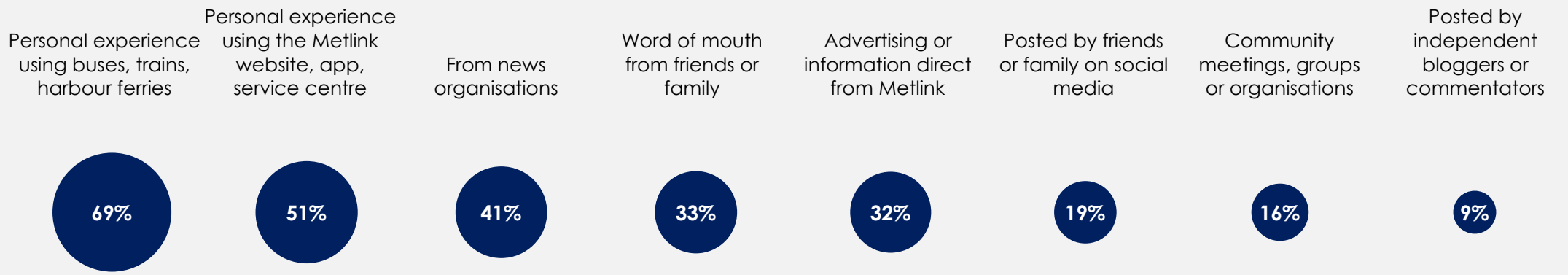


Source: C1, D2
Base: All aware of Greater Wellington (n=991)

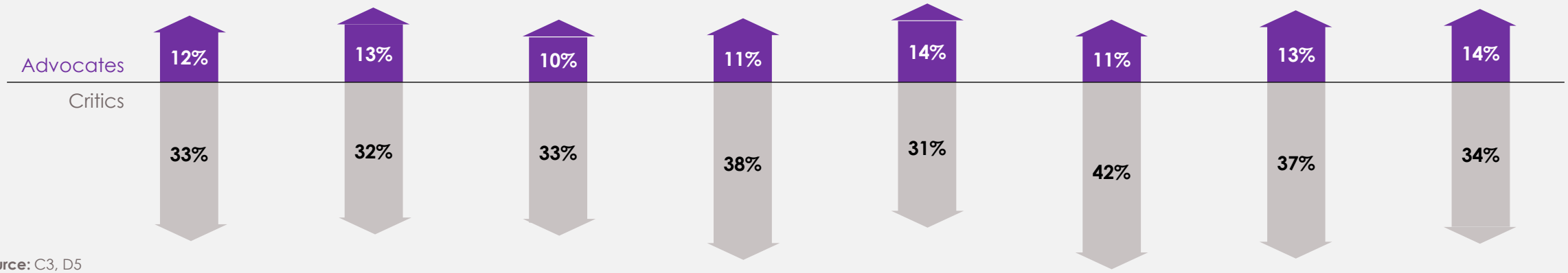
For Metlink, perceptions are primarily formed through personal experiences. However, news coverage does still have reasonable influence.

Using advocacy as a proxy for channel sentiment, we see that sentiment is generally consistent across channels for Metlink. However, news coverage tends to be slightly less positive than other sources.

Influence channels



Advocacy by channel

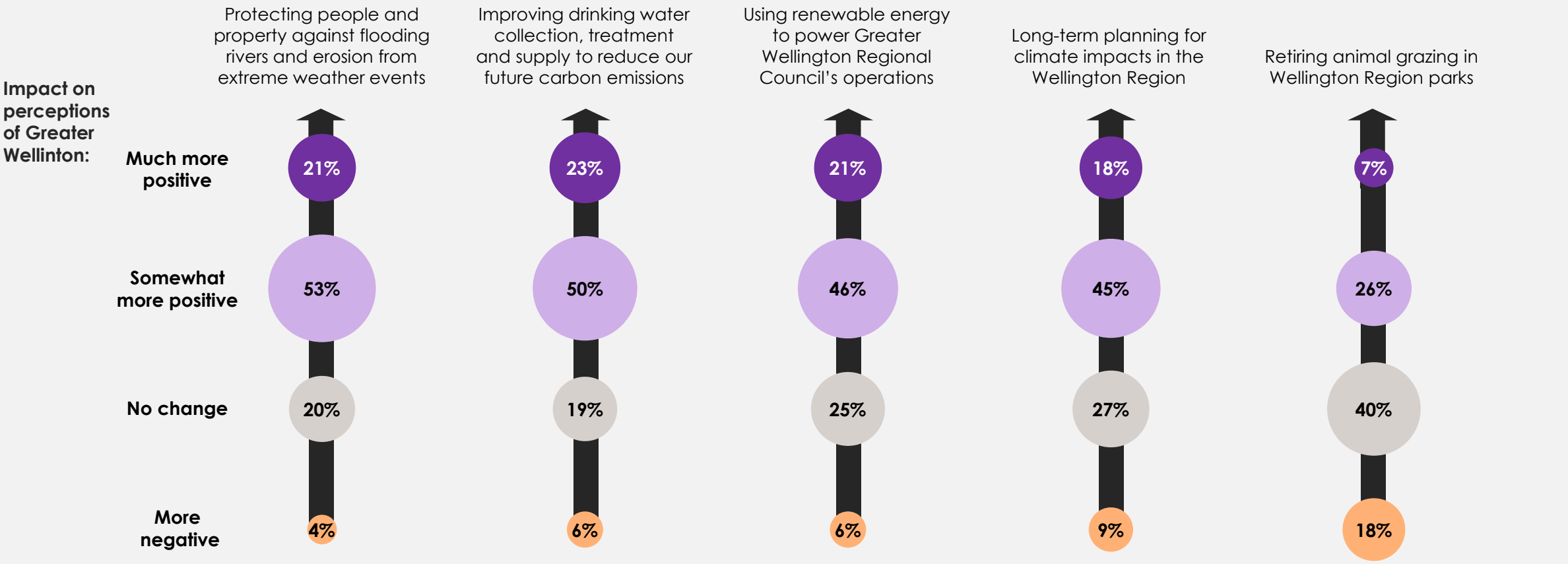


Source: C3, D5
Base: All aware of Metlink (n=996)

Climate action

Residents were asked how positively or negatively Greater Wellington's climate action projects influenced their overall perception of the organisation.

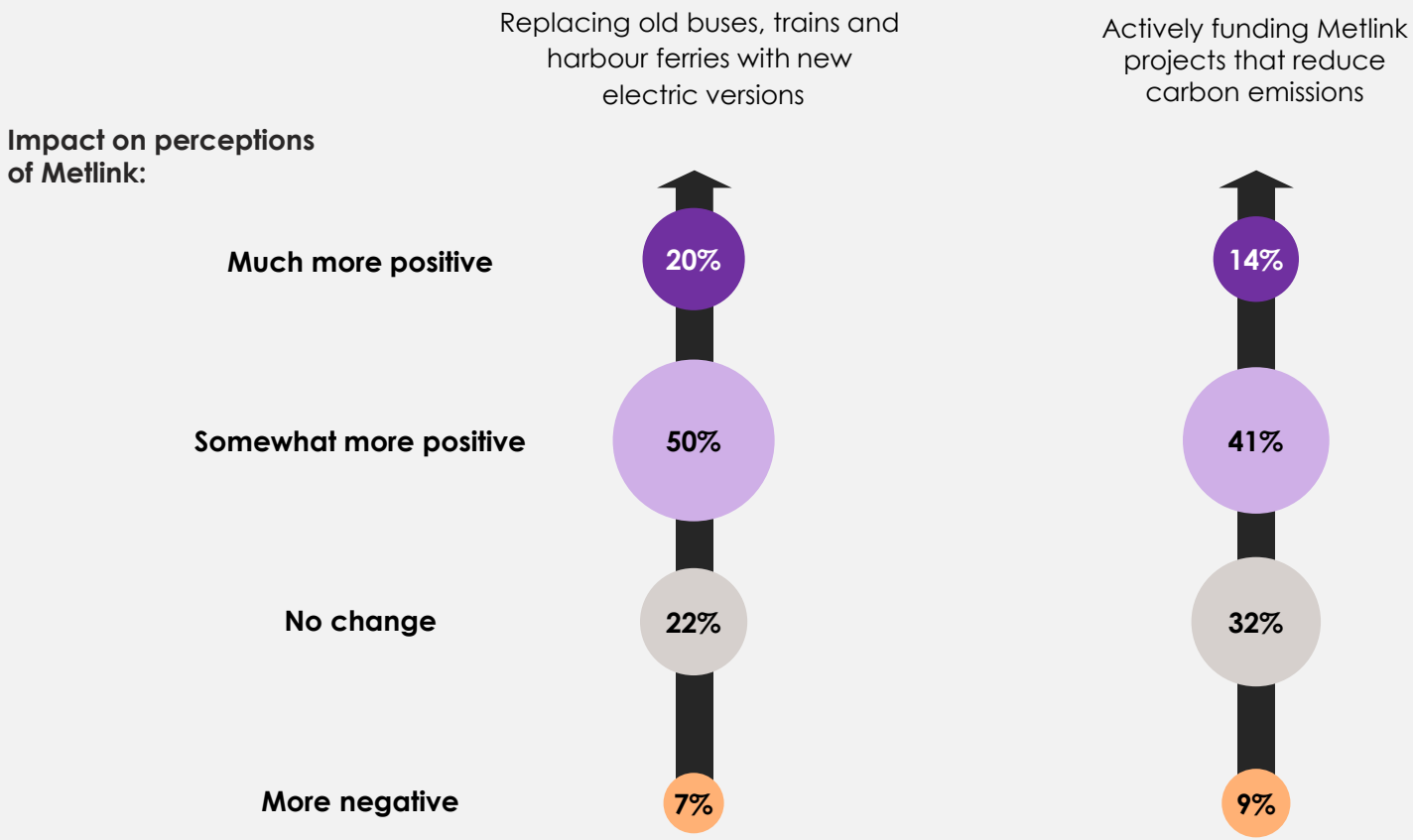
Sentiment was generally very positive. However, the retirement of animal grazing in parks emerged as a somewhat polarising issue.



Source: E2
Base: All residents (n≈1,000)
Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Metlink's climate action projects were also asked about...

Sentiment was most positive for the replacement of old buses, trains and ferries.

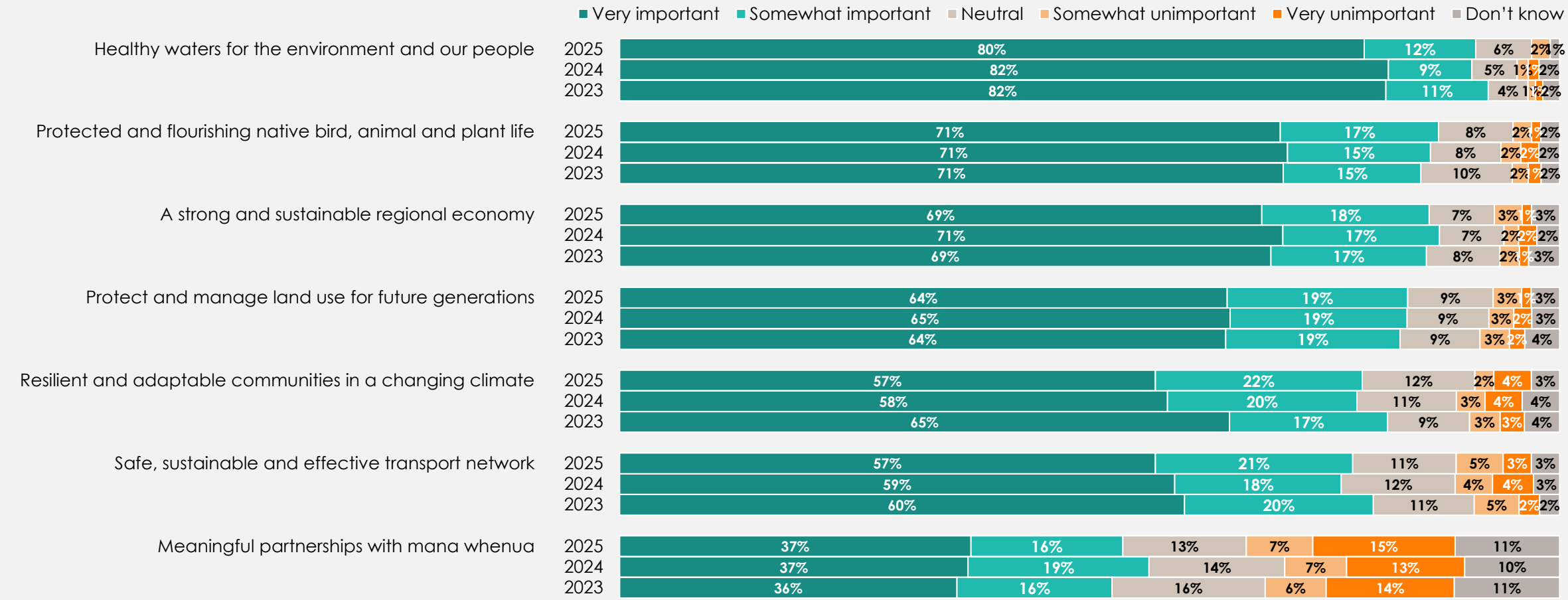


Source: E2
Base: All residents (n≈1,000)
Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Community outcomes

We asked residents how important they consider each of Greater Wellington's community outcomes to be. Responses remain consistent, with residents rating most outcomes as very important.

Particularly strong support was shown for healthy waters, a strong and sustainable economy, protected and flourishing flora and fauna, and effective land protection and management.

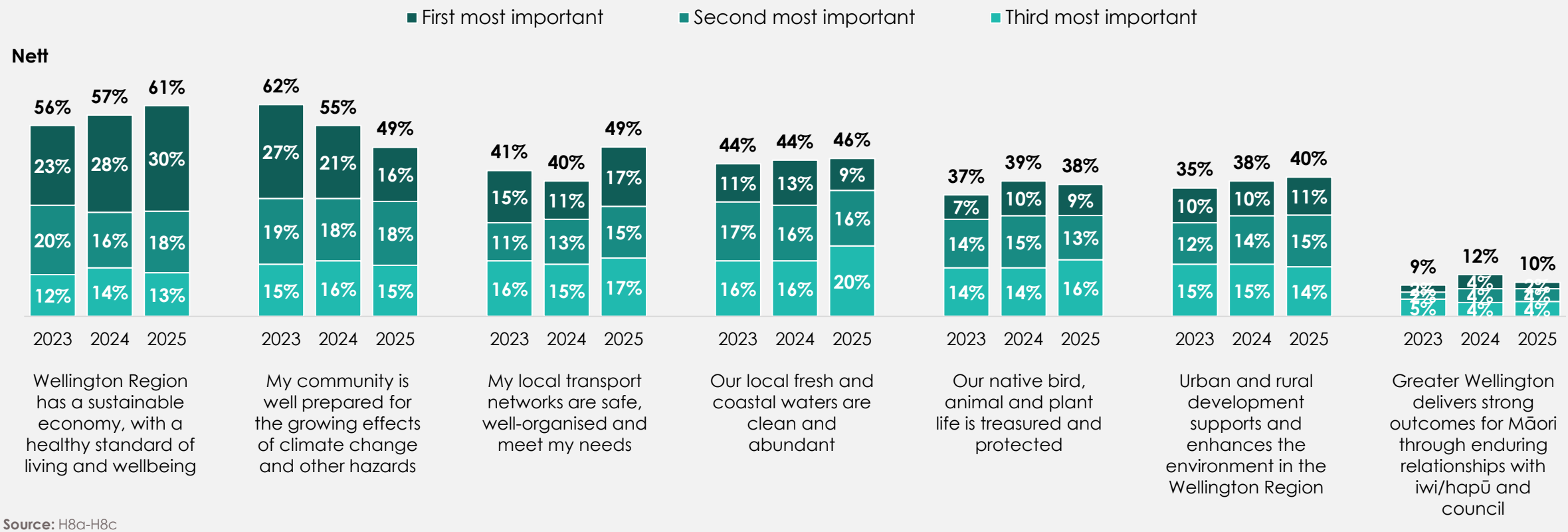


Source: H1b-H7b
Base: All residents (n≈1,000)

When asked to reflect on what matters most and rank the outcomes, residents prioritise the economy above all else.

While the perceived importance of climate change preparation has declined, the importance placed on public transport has increased.

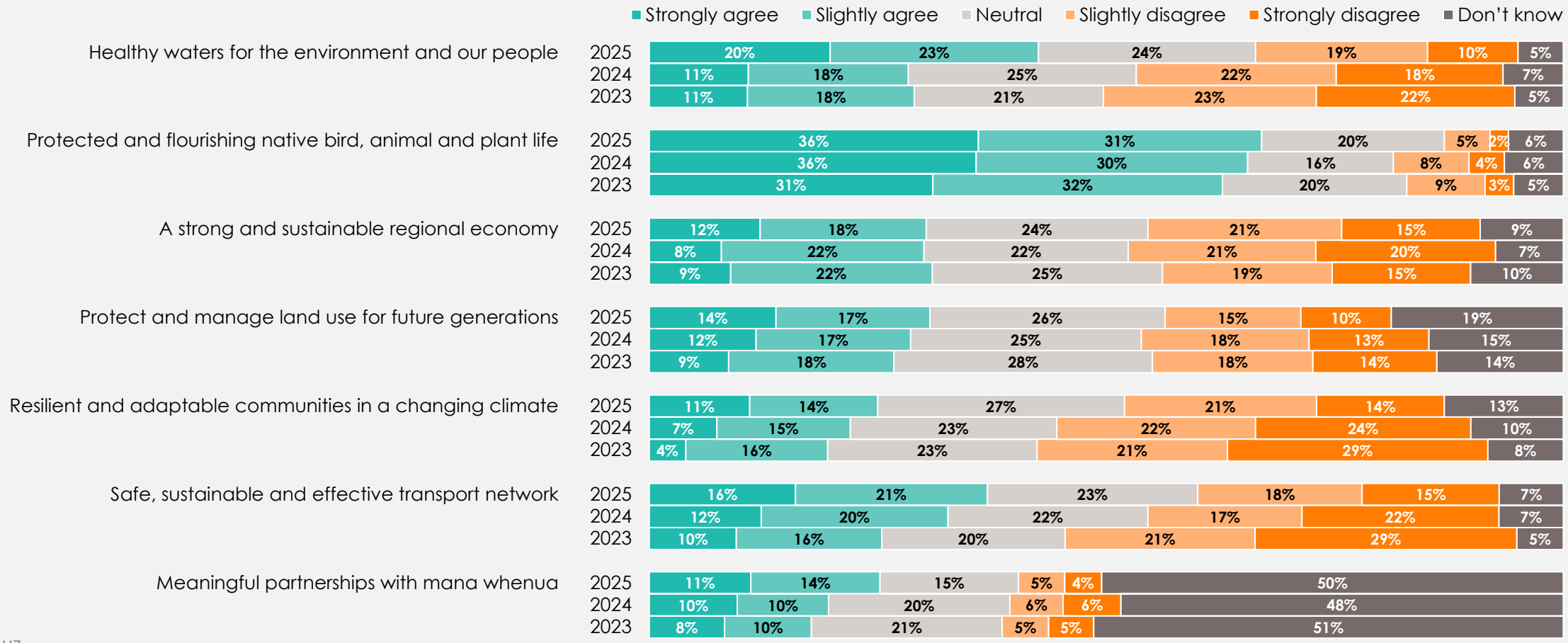
Importance of community outcomes



Source: H8a-H8c
Base: All residents (n≈1,000)

Perceptions have improved across all of Greater Wellington's community outcomes.

The most notable improvement is for perceptions of healthy waters. Perceptions of public transport and partnerships with iwi also show noteworthy improvements this year.



Source: H1a-H7a
Base: All residents (n≈1,000)

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