



INTERFACE
COUNCILS

Interface Councils Submission into
Infrastructure Victoria's 30-Year Strategy

- *Draft objectives and needs*

March 2016

Introduction

Interface Councils welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30 Year Strategy (objectives and needs) and participate in this critical conversation about Victoria's current and future infrastructure demands to ensure we can pave the way for socially, economically and environmentally liveable communities.

Interface Councils is a group of ten municipalities that form a ring around metropolitan Melbourne comprising Cardinia Shire Council, City of Casey, Hume City Council, Melton City Council, Mitchell Shire Council, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Nillumbik Shire Council, City of Whittlesea, Wyndham City Council and Yarra Ranges Council.

This submission intends to provide Infrastructure Victoria with a set of recommendations in regards to the draft objectives and needs outlined in the *Laying the foundations* paper. It does so by providing feedback in response to the following questions:

1. How can the objectives be improved?
2. Should any objectives be added/removed or combined?
3. How infrastructure could the needs be improved and, in particular, what needs don't appear that Interface Councils would like to see included?
4. What needs are most important to Interface Councils?

Background

A significant portion of Victoria's growth over the past five years - growth that has put increasing pressure on current infrastructure and demanded new infrastructure faster than has been possible to deliver - has occurred in Interface Councils. Between 2009 and 2014 Interface Councils accommodated almost 50 per cent of the State's population growth at a rate of 3.2 per cent per annum. In addition to accommodating growth, Interface Councils are responsible for 90 percent of Melbourne's Green Wedges, some of Melbourne's most important assets that require adequate and appropriate infrastructure to be maintained and protect biodiversity, agricultural productivity and to realise the full latent value they hold for the entire state.

In the next 15 years, the population increase in the outer suburbs will account for approximately 65 per cent of Melbourne's growth. Some communities are affected by population growth and change more than others, and in some cases rapid growth is exceeding the supply of the infrastructure required to achieve positive, or even adequate social and economic outcomes. Why? Because a lag in infrastructure provision correlates directly with a lack of access to services, employment and education.

International evidence supports the link between investment in innovation, skills development and enabling better access to services, to improved social, economic and environmental outcomes in communities. Outcomes can include better physical and mental health, improved child development, improved education results, better employment outcomes, better social cohesion, sustainable and productive natural environments and a more tangible feeling of community safety. The product of which is more resilient, liveable and sustainable Victorian communities.

Key recommendations

Interface Councils feel there is an absence of a ‘vision for the people of Victoria’ in the current strategy framework. It is crucial this is at the forefront of Infrastructure Victoria’s 30-Year Strategy, and that the objectives respond to this vision. For the strategy to achieve its purpose, it is absolutely imperative the following key question are considered to establish this vision:

1. What people focused outcomes are we aiming for – how will the quality of living and the lives of Victorians be improved?

Interface Councils strongly support consultation with the general community in the development of this strategy. It is crucial the process demands strong support from the wider Victorian public to achieve a consensus and commitment across the political landscape for infrastructure investment for the longer term. For example; decisions on large infrastructure projects such as the north-south pipeline, Melbourne Metro Rail, design solutions for level crossing removals and East West Road Link should be made within the public sphere, and not confined to within parliament.

In addition to having a clear, people focused vision, targeted objectives and needs, there must be a framework for evaluating the ability for infrastructure investment to deliver on these. A subsequent key question that Interface Councils feel must be addressed is:

2. What will the measures of improved quality of living and lives of Victorians be?

While specific measures should be articulated for each objective in the strategy, Interface Councils believe an appropriate, overarching measurement framework could be the triple bottom line. As stated by the first Infrastructure Victoria paper *From the ground up* “The performance of our infrastructure will affect the shape of our society, economy and environment, just as our society, economy and environment will affect our infrastructure needs.” The social, economic and environmental value of infrastructure investments ultimately underpin the ability for infrastructure to improve the lives of Victorians. For example, when considering the priorities for Victoria, it is not just the larger infrastructure projects which drive economic growth that are important. Often it is the smaller community infrastructure that contributes to the social wellbeing of the community and the State.

Infrastructure Planning Statement

The infrastructure planning statement on page 23 of the document highlights the need for all levels of government to work together. As part of this statement Interface Councils believe reference must be made to Precinct Structure Plans that Growth Areas and the MPA have developed as these are vital in informing the long term planning for Victoria.

1. How could the objectives be improved?

- The draft objectives are, in general positive, but quite broad.
 - It is suggested that significantly more could be embedded into the existing objectives to provide clearer and measurable direction in terms of what each objective is aiming to achieve, e.g. provision of high-quality education facilities (1C) spans across many needs; reduce disadvantage, enable the future workforce, build social networks, enhance well-being and reduce the need for health infrastructure.
- The title of objective 1 should be stated as ‘population requirements’ as growth should be considered as inevitable.
 - Objective 1 requires greater consideration. At present we are assuming a demand driven approach to infrastructure provision based on population growth. It is important a 30 year plan for infrastructure provision has foresight for population that the document stipulates is expected to occur in the coming decades. At some point there will need to be a national discussion on population growth in terms of its sustainability, impact on the built and natural environment and the economists doctrine that, population growth is the most significant driver of economic growth c.f. generational drivers, i.e. new technologies and higher standards of education and health care.
- Objectives 1, 2 and 3 need reflect the importance of early delivery of infrastructure
- Rebadge Objective 10 as ***Creating a resilient Victoria.***
 - Objective 10 raises the issue of resilience but appears narrow. The concepts behind ‘Resilient Melbourne’; part of the international 100 Resilient Cities program, provide an opportunity for broader debate on making Melbourne and regional cities more resilient to challenges and shocks ranging from emergency events like fire and flood to oil shortages, utility and agricultural failures, community rioting or unemployment. Infrastructure is an important component of enhancing our resilience

2. Should any objectives be added, removed, or combined?

- A gap (in objectives) with regard to adequate transport infrastructure exists. Although it is inferred in Objective 4, a more explicit emphasis on the importance of ensuring access, frequency and reliability of transport infrastructure, is required in the strategy. It is suggested an objective ‘*Supporting sustainable transport infrastructure*’ (i.e. roads, bicycle networks, rail (freight and passenger and, public transport) be included.
 - Consider a need to improve bus service infrastructure. Interface Councils have undertaken research to identify priority bus routes in interface areas that would enable services to reach minimum service levels.
 - Consider a need within this objective should focus on community transport infrastructure to cater for the growing ageing population and those transport disadvantaged residents who cannot access private or public transport.

- It is recommended some objectives be combined due to unnecessary overlap, including:
 - 2 & 3 under ***'Equity of Access'***
 - This is one of the most important objectives. Disadvantage is created when people do not have equal access to infrastructure and services that make for healthy and vibrant communities, when they need them thus justifying the combination of objectives two and three. A change in the title of this objective arises from the logic that addressing disadvantage means waiting for something to happen rather than being proactive. This is a proactive document and a plan for the next 30 years should adopt a pre-emptive approach.
 - The combined objective must also address accessibility for residents in the interface:
 - Physical isolation underpins socioeconomic disadvantage and lack of social participation
 - Access to health services is limited, particularly for the elderly
 - Car dependency presents a significant challenge for social equity. A large number of people with below average incomes in outer suburban areas are reliant on cars as the only means of transport and as such are impacted by increases in petrol and other car related costs
 - Less access to employment and educational opportunities than in established areas.
 - 4 & 5 under a new title ***'Productive economies'***

3. How the infrastructure could needs be improved and in particular, what needs don't appear that Interface Councils would like to see included?

It is recommended that in relation to:

Objective 1: Respond to population growth and change

Improvements for Need 1A:

- Re-word *'Address infrastructure deficits in high growth areas'* to: ***'Put infrastructure where it is needed most'*** as the current wording could be confused with Growth Areas from a Land use planning perspective. This may imply infrastructure shortfalls in established areas are not as significant to address.
 - It should address infrastructure deficits in changing demographics areas. Renewal and upgrade of existing infrastructure including VicRoads road network, footpaths and community facilities
 - This need must also consider the importance of leisure and sporting infrastructure

Improvements for Need 1B:

- Consider rewording *'Manage increasing demands of health infrastructure'* to ***'Improve investment and connectivity to health infrastructure'***.

Improvements for Need 1C:

- Use ***'education facilities'*** in place of *'school facilities'* so it includes the tertiary sector.

Objective 2: Support healthy, safe and vibrant communities

- Consider a need around increasing the diversity of and access to nature based and tourist destinations close to population centres e.g. central Melbourne.
 - This would acknowledge the importance of destinations such as Green Wedges, coastal areas and national parks close to population centres. The current wording implies a focus on the immediate environment, mostly urban, and excludes the benefits of providing points of interest/destinations one to two hour trip away from Melbourne.
 - There is also a link between these destinations in facilitating active living to improve public health outcomes.

Objective 3: Reduce disadvantage

- Consider a need to improve *access* to health services and links to education
 - Addressing disadvantage is very much related improving access to housing, employment, health and education.

Improvements for Need 3B:

- Consider including diversity of ‘housing mix’ in addition to ‘social’ housing i.e. *Address housing affordability challenges with better social housing and a more diverse housing mix.*

Objective 4: Enable workforce participation

Improvements for Need 4B:

- The term non-central city does provide an accurate indication of the area it refers to, consider using *outer suburban*
- ‘Provide better links to non-central city employment centres’ could be modified to read **‘Support the growth and success of outer suburban city employment centres’**. This would acknowledge it is not just about improving public transport or road infrastructure (links) but also includes ITC, access, and the overall attractiveness of these centres as an alternative employment hub to central Melbourne

Objective 5: Lift Victoria’s productivity

- Consider a need to assist in addressing bottlenecks in efficiency e.g. traffic congestion.

Objective 6: Support Victoria’s changing, globally integrated economy

- Switch Need 6A and 6B to highlight that ensuring a *highly skilled, digitally connected work through infrastructure* is at the forefront of this objective
- Consider a need; *Infrastructure to support a diverse economy*
 - It would be beneficial to diversify the economy as much as possible so that it becomes more resilient and less prone to shocks. The Puffing Billy is a good example of a destination point close to Melbourne and Melbourne airport. This makes it a very popular tourist destination among international visitors.

Improvements for Need 6A:

- Incorporate the need to support infrastructure renewal and potential development on Coastal and Crown land to ensure tourism sustainability.

Objective 7: Promote sustainable production and consumption

- Consider a need around sustainable (clean and green) agriculture
 - This would recognise the role of agriculture and food production especially to the growing Asian markets.
- Consider including a need to address the maintenance of viable farm lands or food bowls as well as natural environments and biodiversity in terms of food security, including protection against threats from urban expansion.

Improvements for Need 7A:

- Re-word Improve *'Rural and regional water security'* to ***'Water security'***.
 - This issue is bigger than just rural and regional areas. We need security of supply at an appropriate quality for agricultural, amenity and environmental purposes
 - This should also encompass increasing the use of recycled water for agriculture or, in the future considering potable water as an alternative to expensive dams and desalination plants. This is also consistent with the guiding principle "consider non-build solutions first."

Objective 8: Protect and enhance natural environments

- Include an additional need 8C- *Preserve and enhance Indigenous and European History*

Improvements for Need 8B:

- Include marine environments i.e. 'Improve the health of waterways and **marine environments** through infrastructure'

Objective 9: Support climate change and mitigation and adaption

- Consider a more explicit need to provide infrastructure that supports the renewable energy sector.
- As a measure the strategy should include climate indicators.

4. What needs are most important to Interface Councils?

The two needs Interface Councils feel are the most important in the current context are:

Priority 1: 1A- Address infrastructure deficits in high-growth areas (with a focus on transport and community infrastructure)

Priority 2: 4B- Provide better links to non-central city employment centres (with the inclusion of the changes recommended on page 6)

Conclusion

As outlined in this submission, it is imperative that first and foremost, there is a vision for how this document will achieve positive outcomes for the lives of Victorians. In addition, being a proactive document, the objectives and needs must reflect the importance of early delivery of infrastructure as opposed to the provision of infrastructure to meet demand. The demand driven approach adopted for too long has had clear social, economic and environmental consequences on communities, and in particular Interface communities.

Interface Councils look forward to continuing a constructive dialogue with Infrastructure Victoria and other stakeholders during the development of this strategy.