

# INTERFACE COUNCILS LIVEABILITY POLICY

JUNE 2018



**INTERFACE**  
COUNCILS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Auditor-General has stipulated that rapid growth within the Interface Councils Region (ICR) is 'creating unprecedented challenges' for the appropriate delivery of services and infrastructure. This reality is having a drastic impact on the liveability of ICR communities and quality of life within the region.

Last year, Interface Councils began the process of better understanding the true state of liveability within the ICR. This work was published in the *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot* and illustrates a disturbing trend of lower liveability, when contrasted with the rest of Melbourne.

The *Interface Councils Liveability Policy* begins a greater conversation of how to tackle the major liveability challenges within the ICR. More specifically, the *Interface Councils Liveability Policy* aims to address the liveability issues facing the region's residents by providing a framework for:

- Vibrant spaces and places
- Housing that works
- Healthy communities
- Moving people
- Access to local jobs

Each of these initiatives outlines a suite of policy opportunities that Interface Councils believes will have a positive impact on liveability and improve the quality of life for people living in the ICR. The intent of the policy is to provide solutions that will help to better manage growth and address the issues that are impacting the daily lives of ICR residents.

**“ Rapid growth is creating unprecedented challenges for infrastructure and service delivery, especially in the growth areas, where infrastructure and services of all types are limited and generally lag behind population settlement. ”**

Victorian Auditor-General  
*Effectively Planning for Population Growth*  
27 August 2017





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# ABOUT INTERFACE COUNCILS

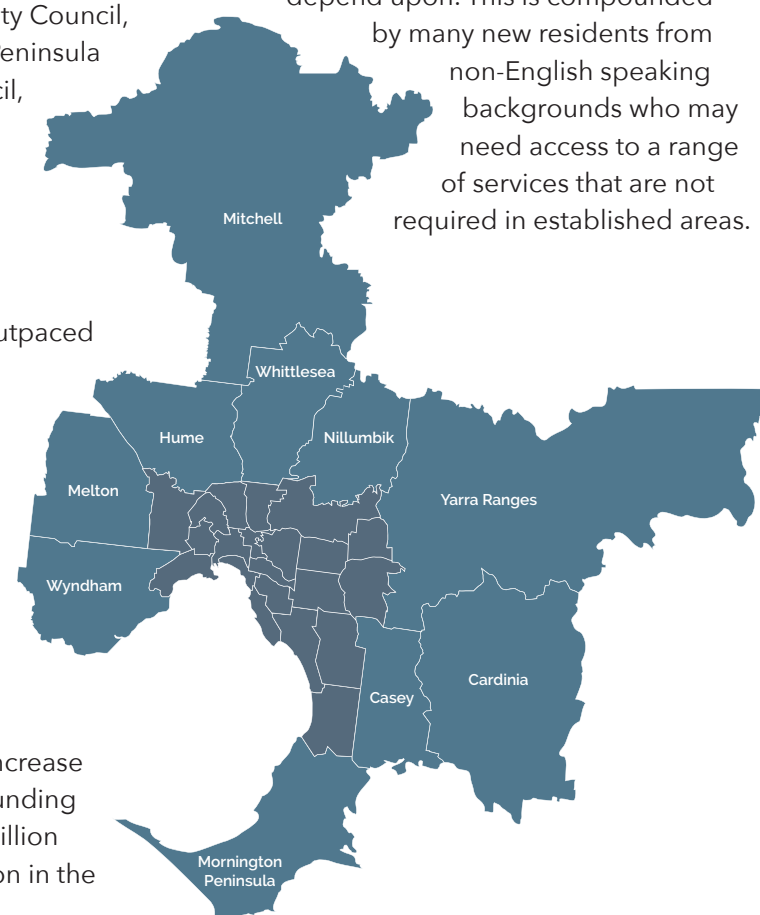
Interface Councils represents one of Australia's fastest growing regions. Interface Councils is a coalition of ten municipalities that form an urban ring around metropolitan Melbourne which is home to more than 1.6 million residents.<sup>1</sup>

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 Shire Council, the Interface Councils represents vibrant and welcoming communities.

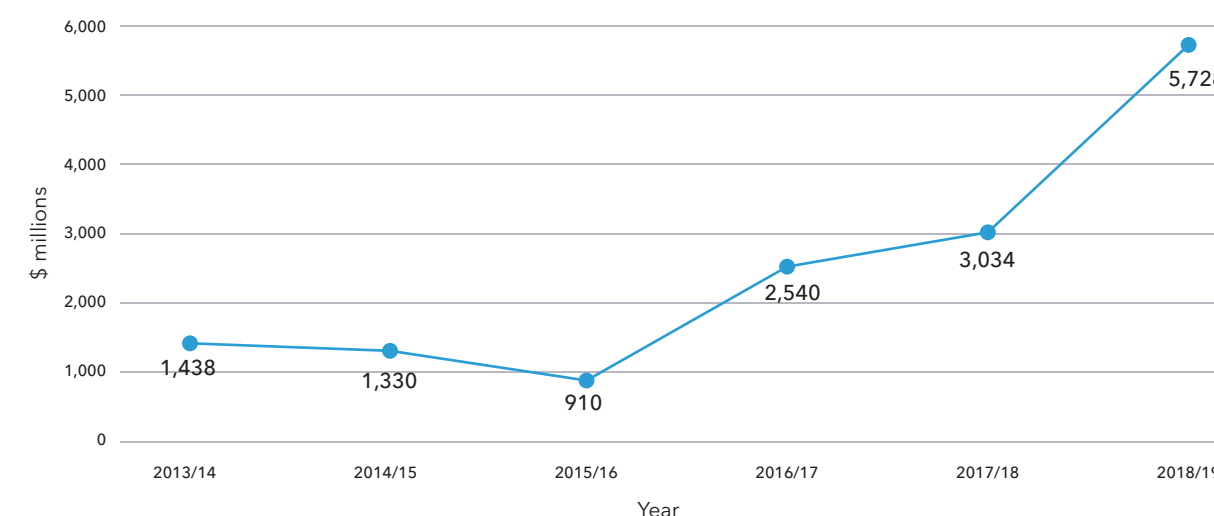
Over the past decade, the ICR has outpaced the rest of Melbourne in population growth. New residents have flocked to the ICR for its affordability and lifestyle. The ICR now accounts for 26% of Victoria's population and 34% of metropolitan Melbourne's population and during the past five years, the ICR has accommodated 44% of Victoria's growth and 49% of metropolitan Melbourne's growth.<sup>2</sup>

Growth has also spurred a gradual increase in State Government infrastructure funding over a four-year period from \$1.33 billion in the 2014/15 budget to \$2.84 billion in the 2017/18 budget.<sup>3</sup>

As the fastest growing region in Melbourne, population forecasts indicate that the ICR will grow by more than 765,000 people by the end of 2031.<sup>4</sup> The impact of growth is drastically changing the characteristics and demographics of the region, which is straining the services and infrastructure residents depend upon. This is compounded by many new residents from non-English speaking backgrounds who may need access to a range of services that are not required in established areas.

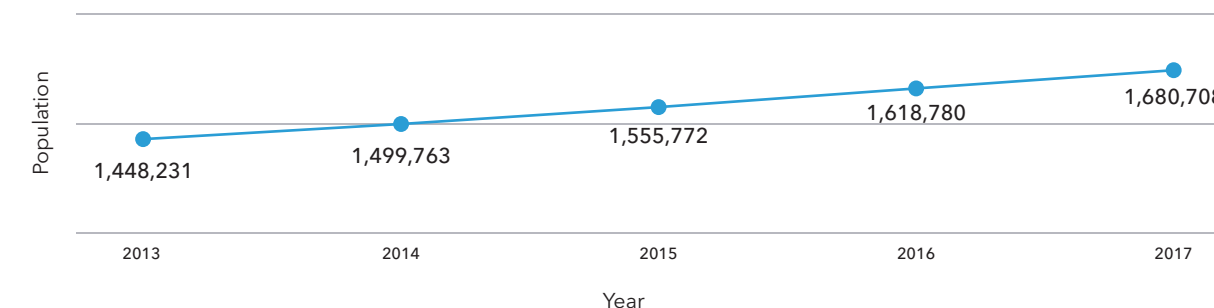


Total estimated investment over four years for infrastructure



Essential Economics. (2013). Interface Budget Scorecard 2013., Essential Economics. (2014). Interface Budget Scorecard 2014., Essential Economics. (2015). Interface Budget Scorecard 2015., Essential Economics. (2016). Interface Budget Scorecard 2016., Essential Economics. (2017). Interface Budget Scorecard 2017., Essential Economics. (2018). Interface Budget Scorecard 2018.

Interface Councils population growth 2013 - 2017



Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Estimated Resident Population, Local Government Areas 2001 to 2017; Victoria.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2016. 'Table 2. Estimated Resident Population, Local Government Areas', Victoria. data cube.

<sup>2</sup> Essential Economics. (2017). Interface Budget Scorecard 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Essential Economics. (2018). Interface Budget Scorecard 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Essential Economics. (2018). One Melbourne or Two? Implications of Population Growth for Infrastructure and Services in Interface Areas.





## UNDERSTANDING LIVEABILITY

At the heart of understanding liveability is the acknowledgement that there is no one definition. For example, *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* describes liveability as a measure of a city's residents' quality of life, which is used to benchmark cities around the world. It includes socioeconomic, environmental, transport and recreation measures.<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Arundel, Melanie Lowe, Paula Hooper, Rebecca Roberts, Julianna Rozek, Carl Higgs and Billie Giles-Corti provide a comprehensive definition of liveability, within their *Creating liveable cities in Australia* research, as communities that are:

**"Safe, attractive, socially cohesive and inclusive, and environmentally sustainable; with affordable and diverse housing lined by convenient public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure to employment, education, public open space, local shops, health and community services."**<sup>6</sup>

Interface Councils has drawn on these and a range of other liveability definitions and tools to help develop a comprehensive set of indicators that measure liveability throughout Melbourne's inner and outer suburbs. These findings can be found in the *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*.

<sup>5</sup> State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. (2017). Metropolitan Planning Strategy: Plan Melbourne 2017-2050. Brunswick: Impact Digital. p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Arundel, J., et al. (2017). *Creating liveable cities in Australia*. Centre for Urban Research (CUR) RMIT University. Melbourne. p. 20.



# CLOSING THE LIVEABILITY GAP

Melbourne is recognised as a beacon of liveability around the world and rankings often place the city at the top of liveability indexes.

An arts and culture capital, sporting destination and economic centre with vast opportunities, Melbourne has attracted new residents from all walks of life. Historically, Melbourne has been well positioned to accommodate growth, due to the city's vast public transport and road networks that link the central business district and inner suburbs. However, beneath the accolades and success, the story of two very different 'Melbournes' has emerged in the wake of the city's growing population.

Increased demand for housing in Melbourne has resulted in higher prices and led many residents to seek more affordable and available options in the city's outer suburbs. Many communities have seen their populations proliferate, which has strained existing infrastructure and services.

The challenges facing the ICR are well documented. In 2012, the *Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne* found that Melbourne's outer suburbs lagged behind the rest of Greater Melbourne on a range of liveability measures. Recent findings of the *Interface Group Human Services Gap Analysis*, *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*, and *One Melbourne or Two?* also illustrate a widening liveability gap between Melbourne's inner and outer suburbs.

Action is urgently needed to close the gap and to ensure residents in the ICR are able to enjoy the same access to schools, health services, public transport, road networks, community facilities and local jobs as their inner Melbourne counterparts.

**Bridging the liveability gap will require work from all levels of government. Interface Councils is committed to doing their part and calls on Victoria's elected officials to adopt the proposals of this policy.**







## VIBRANT SPACES AND PLACES

Home to some of the most pristine natural open spaces in Melbourne, Interface Councils manages 90% of Green Wedges in Victoria. Residents of the ICR enjoy more open space per person than anywhere else in Melbourne. The region also boasts a range of facilities that serve as meeting places and recreation hubs for residents. These vibrant open spaces and places have made the ICR an attractive place for people to live and raise a family.

As the ICR continues to grow, local governments are struggling to ensure residents continue to have access to the spaces and places they enjoy. Investment in infrastructure has failed to keep pace with population growth. Urgent funding is needed to operate programs and to build infrastructure that will provide current and future residents with access to parks, community centres, recreation spaces, libraries, public pools and sports fields.

Given these needs, Interface Councils recommends the following:

- Establish the Growing Suburbs Fund (GSF) as a permanent funding mechanism that supports critical community infrastructure projects, open spaces and recreation facilities within the ICR. To make the GSF effective, funding should be at least \$50 million per annum and adjusted each year thereafter to reflect growth rates of the ICR and inflation.

- In conjunction with Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), introduce a long-term funding and management agreement to ensure natural spaces are appropriately protected and preserved for future generations in the ICR.
- In cooperation with various state departments and agencies, undertake a comprehensive review of public assets such as schools, community centres, recreational facilities, service buildings, libraries and sport centres and identify shared-use opportunities for recreation, arts, culture, education, lifelong learning and services.
- In cooperation with DELWP and the Victoria Planning Authority (VPA), put in place an investigative framework and detailed process that determines the need for new infrastructure and the impact any new infrastructure may have on the unique character of neighbouring towns and villages.
- To ensure continued protection of valuable open natural spaces, agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive areas within the ICR, enhance density where possible, affirm commitment to the Urban Growth Boundaries and strengthen protection of Green Wedge areas.





# HOUSING THAT WORKS

Demand for housing in the ICR has increased steadily over the past five years. During this time, median home and unit prices have increased by nearly 55.8% and 32.5% respectively across metropolitan Melbourne.<sup>7</sup> Seeking price relief, many homeowners and renters have made their home in the ICR. However, affordable housing in the region remains a concerning issue. The ICR continues to report the highest levels of mortgage and rental stress in Melbourne.<sup>8</sup> To complicate matters, social housing is vastly under supplied, and aged-care living spaces are limited within the ICR.

Ensuring residents have access to affordable housing is an essential component of building liveable neighbourhoods in the ICR. Further measures are needed to ensure that people can live with dignity and access housing services and crisis accommodation support when needed. Victoria's housing strategies require a more innovative approach that appropriately utilises space and existing infrastructure to create more liveable communities.

Based on wide consultation among stakeholders and residents, Interface Councils proposes the following to address housing concerns across the ICR:

- Expand the social housing stock in the ICR by requiring new detached and attached

developments to allocate ten per cent of new dwellings (homes/apartments) to be designated as social housing.

- The Victorian Government to remain committed to the \$1 billion Social Housing Growth Fund and associated initiatives, as stipulated in *Homes for Victorians*.<sup>9</sup>
- *Homes for Victorians* Social Housing Growth Fund initiatives are implemented in a transparent manner that can be measured with local statistics to ensure housing needs are accurately assessed in the ICR and that successful initiatives can be expanded to better meet the expressed needs of the Victorian Housing Register.
- Expediate the implementation of *Plan Melbourne* actions to increase the supply of social and affordable housing by:
  - Streamlining decision-making processes for social housing;
  - Providing stronger tools to strengthen the role of planning in the delivery of social housing;
  - Capturing value uplift through rezoning; and
  - Creating provisions that allow for secondary dwellings on existing lots (e.g. granny flats, bedsitters, and basement apartments).

- Increase affordable housing options in the ICR by releasing state lands in proximity to activity centres and major transit hubs with the purpose of entering innovative partnerships with housing associations and developers to build more affordable and social housing units. These actions should be undertaken in conjunction with the Victorian Government's efforts outlined in *Plan Melbourne* to identify surplus state lands for social and affordable housing.
- Renew and expand the \$152 million two-year funding commitment for family violence housing. In consultation with Interface Councils and relevant stakeholders, Department of Health and Human Services should:
  - Explore innovative solutions to help provide the appropriate local short-term or long-term housing and services for people of all ages who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, which includes people who experience family violence.
  - Undertake the appropriate steps to provide better information on homelessness in terms of people living on the streets, using shelters and those at the risk of being homeless. Once completely understood, partner with municipalities to promote service offerings to help people find appropriate living arrangements.
- Work to increase the amount of local emergency accommodation in the ICR to ensure people are not faced with travelling long distances during extreme weather conditions or crises.
- The Victorian Government work with Interface Councils to better understand the housing demand mix and to provide greater housing options for families of all sizes and ages. A concentrated focus of the initiative should be on providing high density mixed-use residential/commercial zoning with a stipulation of a minimum number of three-plus bedroom units. These should be conveniently located near accessible public transport hubs, activity hubs and service centres. Furthermore, suburban developments of attached and single detached homes should be diverse in design and lot size.

<sup>7</sup> Real Estate Institute of Victoria. (2017). *Victorian Insights: Median Sale Price*.

<sup>8</sup> Interface Councils. (2017). *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*.

<sup>9</sup> State of Victoria Department of Treasury and Finance. (2017). *Homes for Victorians: Affordability, access and choice*. Port Melbourne: State of Victoria





## MOVING PEOPLE

The Melbourne bottleneck is a daily reality for ICR residents. Almost 20% of ICR residents report that they spend at least two hours commuting to and from work.<sup>10</sup> The absence of convenient, direct, accessible, reliable and efficient public transport has enhanced car dependency. The ICR is Melbourne's most car-dependent region, with 75% of residents reporting that they commute to work by car and basic essentials such as schools, supermarkets and parks require a vehicle for access.<sup>11</sup>

Active transportation is limited in the ICR. Bicycle infrastructure at metropolitan train stations lags behind the inner suburbs and accessing local amenities by foot would likely exceed 30 minutes. Bus services are limited and overall walkability within the ICR ranks well below the Melbourne average.<sup>12</sup> Improved infrastructure that encourages a combination of active and public transport is urgently required to meet the demand of the ICR's growing communities.

Understanding the need to improve productivity and help keep Melbourne moving, Interface Councils recommends:

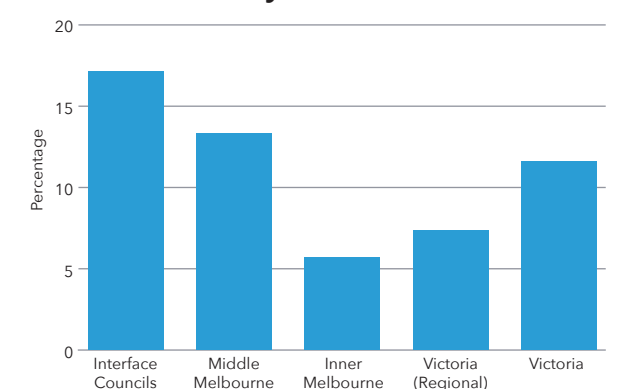
- VicRoads undertake an immediate and thorough review of existing assets to assess traffic management improvements and road enhancements that can improve congestion. Findings should be prioritised

through consultation with the ICR and put forward through a three-year road improvements plan for the ICR.

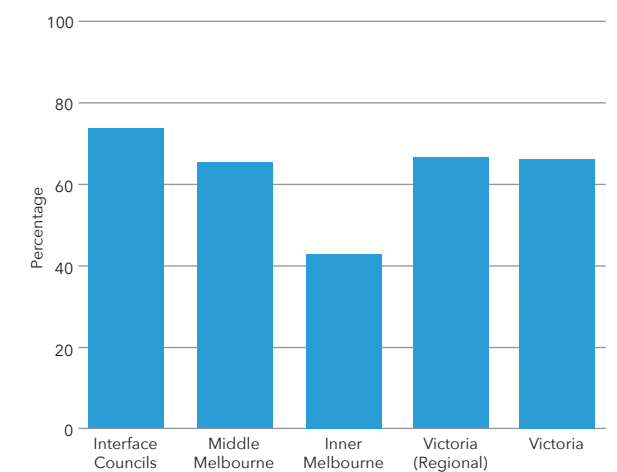
- Improve bus services in the ICR with an immediate base annual investment of \$300 million for improvements identified by Interface Councils and ongoing annual funding that is in line with service increases and inflation.<sup>13</sup>
- To help improve use of train services, undertake appropriate actions to increase station parking for vehicles and bicycle storage.
- A long-term financial commitment for an Outer Suburban Arterial Roads Program that will provide a road works package for the north-west and south-east Melbourne region.
- In accordance with *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, move to immediately begin working with Infrastructure Victoria to identify walking and cycling network improvements (i.e. missing footpath links) and associated capital cost commitments, and fund accordingly.
- Ensure that one of the pilots for retrofitting walking and cycling facilities under *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy* is located within the ICR.

- Support a thorough investigation to determine which barriers should be removed to allow alternative transport to be pursued in regard to new rail technology, driverless vehicles, drone technology, bike sharing, car sharing and ride sharing services.
- To enhance public transport participation in the ICR, increase frequency of bus and train services and offer free public transport services before 7:00am and after 7:00pm.
- Continue to make strategic investments in rail projects that will increase frequency of trains and provide greater connectivity across Melbourne.
- To create more walkable and accessible communities, work with DEWLP and VPA to encourage high density, mixed-use residential and commercial spaces at street level that are located near transit hubs and activity centres.
- In cooperation with Public Transport Victoria (PTV), VicRoads and Parks Victoria, develop a seasonal public transport strategy to alleviate congestion on local roads that service popular tourist attractions throughout the ICR.

**People with at least 2 hour daily commute**



**Journeys to work by car**



<sup>10</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. (2015). *Local Government Statistical Profiles*.

<sup>11</sup> Interface Councils. (2017). *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*.

<sup>12</sup> Interface Councils. (2017). *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*.

<sup>13</sup> Interface Councils. (2017). *2018/19 Interface Councils Budget Submission*.





# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Unprecedented growth in the ICR has increased pressure on essential services and infrastructure. Access to pharmacies, dental services, general practitioners and allied health services remain below the rest of Melbourne and the state average.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the health and wellbeing of residents is significantly impacted and will likely have long-term consequences for State Government, local communities and the region if not addressed adequately.

Residents in the region also report higher levels of psychological distress and family violence incidents than residents living in other parts of Melbourne.<sup>15</sup>

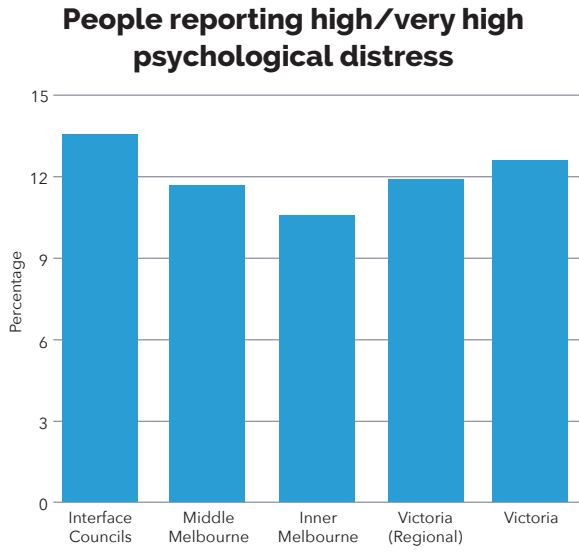
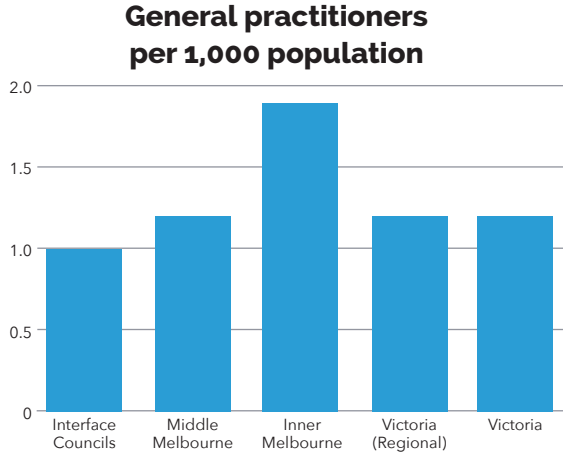
Failure to act immediately to close the gaps for essential social services and infrastructure will have a lasting impact on the region, leading to an ongoing divide between the ICR and the rest of Melbourne.

Interface Councils are committed to working with government to improve the service gap and recommends:

- The Office of Suburban Development works across government departments and with Interface Councils to advise the Metropolitan Development Advisory Panel (MDAP) on how to create more effective and efficient service delivery models that will met the needs of residents across the ICR.

- Implementing all recommendations outlined in the Victorian Auditor-General's Report, *Effectively Planning for Population Growth*, over the next four years to ensure the timely delivery of services.
- Implementing the findings of the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence, specifically the need to invest in and deliver local services that focus on primary prevention, early intervention and response.
- An immediate annual investment of \$250 million to bridge the health and human service gaps identified in the *Interface Councils Human Services Gap Analysis* and a long-term funding agreement to ensure appropriate mental health, allied health and support service levels in the ICR are comparable with the rest of Melbourne.<sup>16</sup>
- Over the next 15 years, commit \$2.8 billion to address the infrastructure and services gap by investing in schools, hospitals and libraries.<sup>17</sup>
- The Department of Education and Training work with LGAs to secure early land acquisition for the timely provision of schools and early years facilities and when the opportunity exists, collocate with other facilities in order to better optimise community infrastructure and assets.

- In coordination with Interface Councils, review all building inventory that could be used to provide a range of social services, specifically family violence support, mental health, youth disability, indigenous, migrant and training/education services.
- Conduct a full review of incentive programs to attract health and wellbeing professionals to the ICR and to retain talent into the future. This should include funding considerations by the Victorian Government for integrated service hubs for private practice. In conjunction with these efforts, provide market outlook and benefits of practicing within the ICR.
- The Victorian Government to develop a comprehensive open and transparent data policy that provides third parties, including LGAs, with raw data. Data should include Statistical Area 1 intelligence to appropriately measure a range of possible liveability indicators. The aim of the open data policy is to stimulate innovation, improved service delivery, accountability and data-based decision making and allow LGAs to better plan and identify emerging service gaps.



<sup>14</sup> [42]p. (2017). *Interface Councils Group Human Services Gap Analysis*.  
<sup>15</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. (2015). *Local Government Statistical Profiles*.  
<sup>16</sup> [42]p. (2017). *Interface Councils Group Human Services Gap Analysis*.  
<sup>17</sup> Essential Economics. (2018). *One Melbourne or Two? Implications of Population Growth for Infrastructure and Services in Interface Areas*.

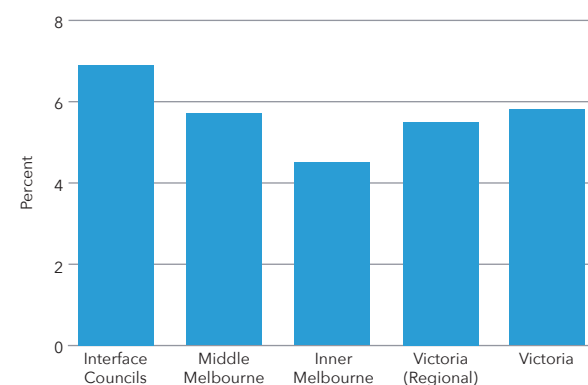




## ACCESS TO LOCAL JOBS

Unemployment in the ICR is currently at 6.9% and continues to hover well above the state unemployment rate of 5.8%.<sup>18</sup> Many residents work outside the communities they reside in, creating an unhealthy work-life balance. Long travel times to and from work, combined with limited public and active transport are impacting the accessibility of employment and the region's liveability as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

**Unemployment Rates**



The ICR requires a jobs action plan to match people with existing vacancies and enhanced economic development support for sustainable businesses that create local employment.

To bring jobs closer to where people live and stimulate greater economic activity, Interface Councils recommends:

- Harnessing the ICR's agricultural and rural roots, Victoria's Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources work closely with Interface LGAs to:
  - Leverage existing partnerships and alliances to capitalise on Australia's growing agritourism market and site-specific points of interest. Consideration should be given to streamlining processes and government-supported financing opportunities;
  - Build on existing and future agriculture activities in the ICR that will create a diverse range of local employment opportunities;
  - Give specific consideration to extend regional funding streams and export grants to rural agritourism and agriculture businesses that are located within the ICR; and
  - Develop a comprehensive plan to provide local agribusinesses with greater access to recycled water.
- A recommitment of four-year funding for the Youth Employment Strategy with a specific focus on helping youth in the ICR find meaningful local employment.

This should be done in conjunction with Ministers helping jumpstart secondary school students and recent graduate careers by promoting a voluntary youth employment program for employers to take part in.

- To stimulate local and accessible job growth in the ICR, explore a long-term strategy that will help to establish government office buildings, service locations and events throughout the region, based on a fairness model to equally distribute benefits.
- In cooperation with Interface Councils, the Victorian Government implement a payroll tax incentive program to attract new businesses to the ICR, particularly enterprises that can help to:
  - Develop a technology ecosystem that will foster further sector growth for start-ups and innovative industries; and
  - Provide a growing professional workforce with local opportunities.
- Economic Development Victoria work with Interface Councils to investigate innovative business and retail hub models to decentralise work and lessen the burden of travel for ICR residents.
- Through consultation with leading businesses, Economic Development Victoria engage with Interface Councils to fully understand the ICR's professional commuting population. This knowledge should be harnessed to help develop and establish a flexible work program that provides touchdown workstations and meeting room locations to bring jobs closer to home for ICR residents.
- In cooperation with Victoria's Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, track skill shortages and surpluses within the ICR to help better match people to jobs across the region. This should be done in conjunction with Regional Training Organisations in order to roll out priority training Centres of Excellence that specifically target residents in career transition and for those entering the workforce.

<sup>18</sup> Interface Councils. (2017). *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*.

<sup>19</sup> Interface Councils. (2017). *Interface Councils Liveability Snapshot*.





# ‘PLAN MELBOURNE’ FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Interface Councils would like to recognise the importance of *Plan Melbourne* and how it is helping to shape a more liveable city.

The *Interface Councils Liveability Policy* aims to complement the actions outlined in *Plan Melbourne*. These actions are listed with the coinciding planks below:

**Vibrant Spaces and Places**

- Action 74
- Action 93

**Housing**

- Action 20
- Action 24
- Action 27

**Moving People**

- Action 42
- Action 43
- Action 44
- Action 45

**Healthy Communities**

- Action 76
- Action 77

**Local Jobs**

- Action 13
- Action 14
- Action 72
- Action 73



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Interface Councils represents the collective voice of City of Casey, Cardinia Shire Council, Hume City Council, Melton City Council, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Mitchell Shire Council, Nillumbik Shire Council, City of Whittlesea, Wyndham City Council and Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

The group of ten municipalities forms a ring around outer metropolitan Melbourne. The Interface Councils Region (ICR) includes seven growth area councils. In addition, Interface Councils manages 90% of Green Wedges, some of Melbourne's most important assets.

For more information contact our secretariat on (03) 8317 0111.



Interface Councils



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