



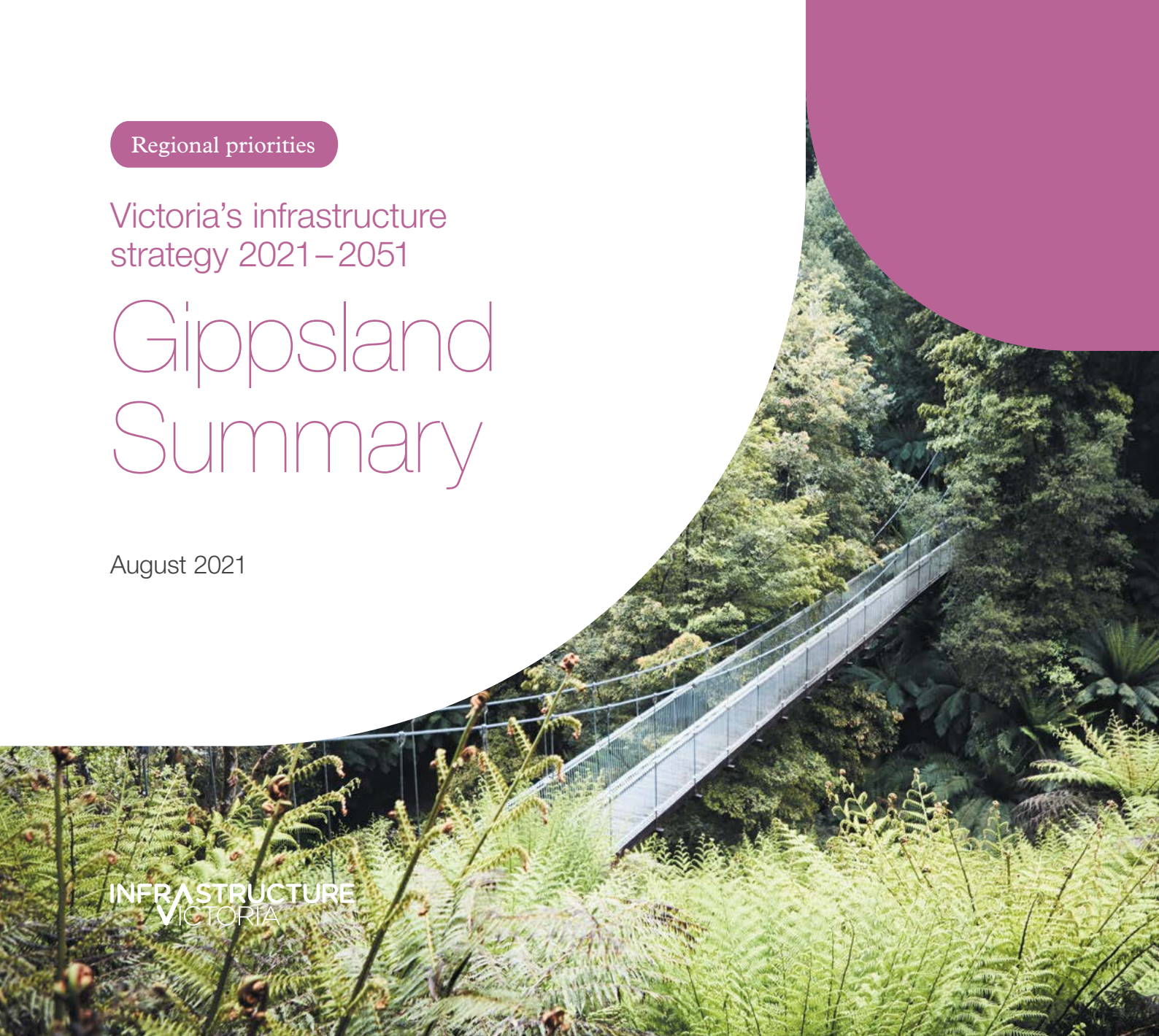
Regional priorities

Victoria's infrastructure
strategy 2021–2051

Gippsland Summary

August 2021

INFRASTRUCTURE
VICTORIA



Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051

In 2016, Infrastructure Victoria developed Victoria's first ever 30-year infrastructure strategy. The 2016 strategy was evidence-based, covered all types of infrastructure, and we consulted widely with stakeholders and the community. To stay relevant and reflect Victoria's evolving infrastructure needs, we update the strategy every three to five years.

Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051 builds on the 2016 strategy, revising many of our original recommendations and adding others in response to Victoria's changing circumstances. But we retain a long-term view of Victoria's infrastructure needs over the next 30 years, remembering that infrastructure lasts many decades and must meet both immediate needs and those in the future. The strategy can be downloaded from our website at infrastructurevictoria.com.au

Aboriginal acknowledgment

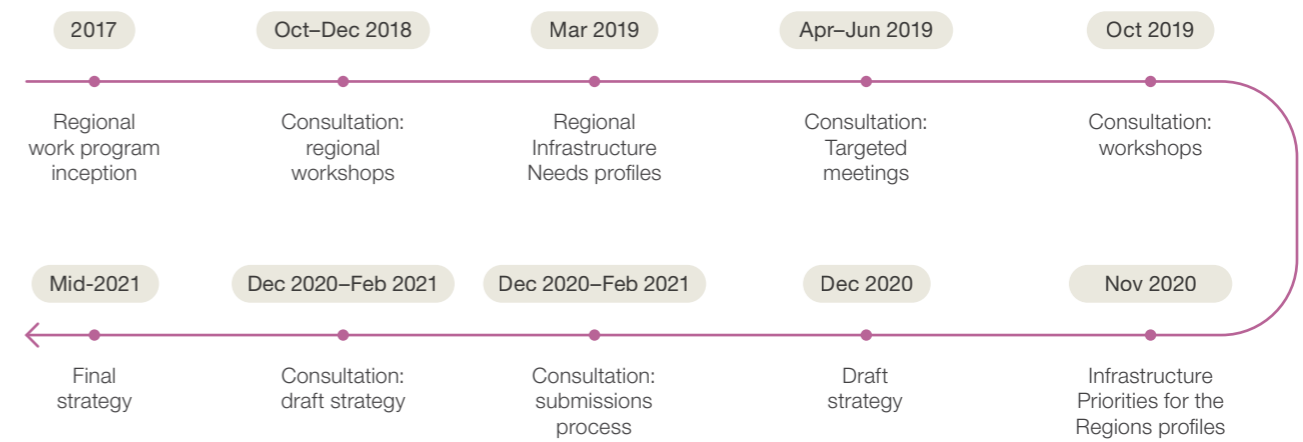
Infrastructure Victoria acknowledges the traditional owners of country in Victoria and pays respect to their elders past and present, as well as elders of other Aboriginal communities. We acknowledge the Gunaikurnai people, whose traditional lands are in the Gippsland Region. We recognise that the state's infrastructure is built on land that has been managed by Aboriginal people for millennia.

Infrastructure Victoria listened to regional Victorians

Over the last four years, we built a deeper understanding of the Gippsland region's infrastructure needs, industry composition, and social disadvantage, in our *Regional infrastructure needs* and *Infrastructure priorities for the regions* projects. We have consulted widely with Gippsland communities, industries and local government to build our regional knowledge, and examined the unique

opportunities and challenges that face each of Victoria's regions. This work produced a *Gippsland regional profile*, a *Gippsland regional industry profile*, and a *Factsheet on Gippsland regional disadvantage*, all available on our website. We used this evidence to develop strategy recommendations that can apply to the Gippsland region.

Engagement timeline



During the consultation period for the draft strategy, we provided more opportunities for Gippsland communities and stakeholders to offer feedback on our draft recommendations, including through surveys, submissions, and hosting a Gippsland regional roundtable discussion.

Combined, this comprehensive process of consultation and engagement guided the development of this Gippsland regional summary and the relevant strategy recommendations. It focusses on infrastructure-related opportunities to build on Gippsland's economic and industry advantages, and to strengthen

local communities by improving health, education, and social inclusion outcomes, while reducing disadvantage.

This document provides a summary of selected recommendations from *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* which respond to the needs and opportunities we identified in Gippsland.

Overview

Gippsland's natural resources have historically given the region an advantage in the primary industries of mining, agriculture, and energy generation. Ongoing structural shifts mean that the region's economy increasingly depends on agriculture and associated food processing industries, as well as on growing service industries, including tourism.

The region offers a diversity of landscapes with coastline, alpine areas, and rainforests. Iconic tourist attractions, such as Wilsons Promontory, the Gippsland Lakes, and the

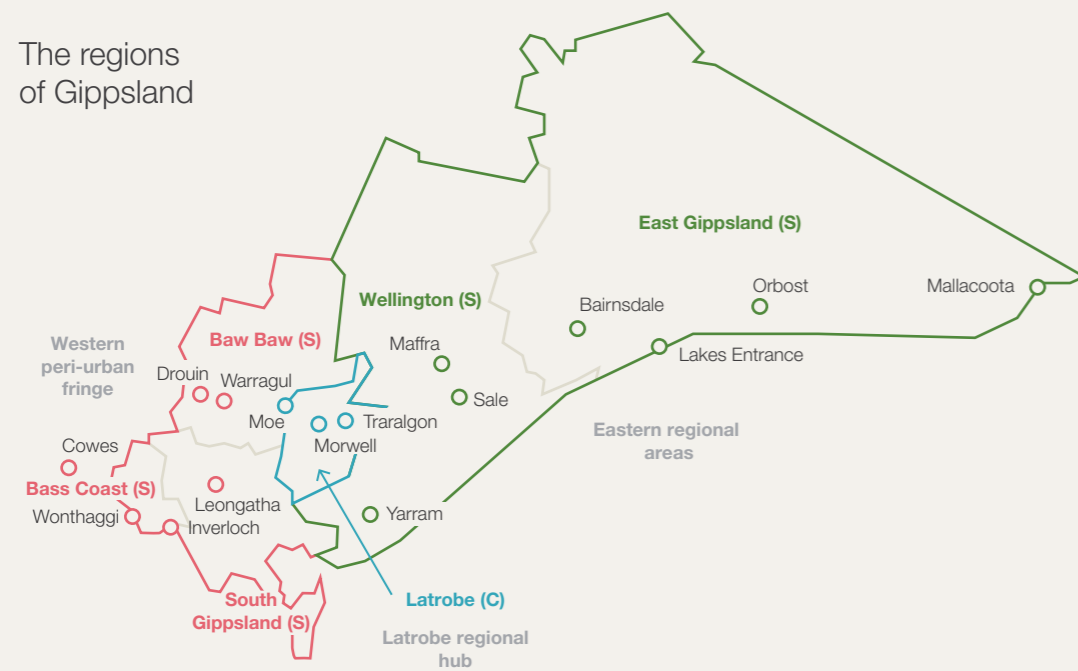
world-famous Penguin Parade at Phillip Island, are all located in Gippsland. The Gippsland region includes the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai people. The lands of the Gunaikurnai people include Port Albert in the south, east along the coast to Marlo, and encompass Mount Buller and the Alpine National Park inland.

The Gippsland region comprises a series of population centres that are distributed longitudinally across the region. The six largest (from west to east) are Warragul, Moe, Morwell, Traralgon, Sale and

Bairnsdale. Drouin, Leongatha and Wonthaggi also serve as service centres in the west of the region and on the south coast, respectively. Moe, Morwell and Traralgon, in the City of Latrobe local government area, are large regional hubs.

The region's population is growing, with particularly strong growth in the west on Melbourne's fringes, leading to development pressures there. East Gippsland, however, is more rural, dominated by national parks with smaller, established towns, lower population growth, and fewer development pressures.

The regions of Gippsland



The region offers a **diversity of landscapes**.



Gippsland's **natural resources** have historically given the region an advantage in the primary industries.



The **east** of the region is relatively rural, dominated by **national parks** with smaller, established towns.



The Gippsland region includes the traditional lands of the **Gunaikurnai people**.



Enhance regional market access and economic growth

Unlock industry growth opportunities

Gippsland's agricultural industry requires better access to higher power electricity distribution networks, especially in the dairy sector. Gippsland farms account for 31% of Victoria's dairy production. Many of the region's farms are powered through outdated single-wire earth return power lines. Changing industry practices, with more energy intensive farming equipment, are leading to capacity constraints which create production and expansion obstacles. The benefits of better power supply can be significant, allowing businesses to expand, to attract new investment, and support local communities. For instance, a \$2.1 million power upgrade for Burra Foods in Korumburra, to prevent costly blackouts and provide stable electricity supply to the area, allowed for increased production and created 40 full time jobs.

Stakeholders also highlight the region's potential for renewable energy. Gippsland has a proposed Renewable Energy Zone, and the regions solar and wind resources represent a unique opportunity. Its existing energy infrastructure means it has transmission capacity to connect new renewable generation in the future. Stakeholders especially highlight wind resources as a strength of the region, and they emphasise the Star of the South project as a central priority. The Star of the South is a proposed offshore wind power project which would be located off the south coast of Gippsland, and advocates predict it would provide various economic benefits including an estimated 2000 direct jobs in Victoria over its lifetime.

Hydrogen industry opportunities also exist in Gippsland. Gippsland is a National Energy Resources Australia (NERA) Hydrogen Cluster and has already received \$250,000 in initial funding. The cluster will allow Gippsland to capitalise on the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain Pilot Project, which aims to produce hydrogen from Latrobe Valley brown coal and export it to Japan.

Recommendations to remove energy infrastructure barriers in Gippsland

Our recommendation to co-fund power supply upgrades responds to the constraints of outdated power supply infrastructure. The recommendation will allow new investment and expansion opportunities for Gippsland's dairy farmers. Where upgrades are shown to deliver benefits to existing users and unlock potential future investment, upgrade costs can be shared between the Victorian Government, power distribution companies, and local businesses.

Renewable energy recommendations aim to remove constraints to future industry development, advocating for solutions which leverage potential renewable energy opportunities and capitalise on Gippsland's existing strong transmission capacity. This includes building of the Marinus Link project, which would strengthen Gippsland's energy connections to Tasmania, and create local jobs during its construction and operation.

Recommendation 03

Augment electricity transmission for renewable energy and resilience

Support augmentation of critical electricity transmission infrastructure by 2027–28 to accommodate new renewable energy generation and improve network resilience and reliability through interconnection with other states.

Recommendation 04

Identify and coordinate Renewable Energy Zones

In the next year, identify Renewable Energy Zones, especially in the state's north-west, and continue to coordinate their development over the next 10 years

Recommendation 80

Upgrade power supply for agriculture and regional industry

In the next five years, contribute toward strategic power supply infrastructure upgrades for agriculture and regional industry, where an independent assessment demonstrates significant potential for increased productivity, competitiveness and growth.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* (section 1.1) for additional recommendations on navigating the energy transition.

Foster regional tourism in Gippsland

Gippsland has outstanding natural attractions, Aboriginal heritage, a pristine coastline, and spectacular national parks. Iconic destinations include the Gippsland Lakes, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Croajingolong National Park, and Phillip Island. Tourism is a major contributor to the regional economy, with tourism expenditure of \$1.65 billion in 2019.

The industry has sustained a double blow from early 2020 as bushfires swept through the east of the region, to be followed by the COVID-19 pandemic just as tourist businesses were starting to work towards recovery. Many of the region's national parks, including parts of Croajingolong, remain closed due to fire damage. Restrictions on travel have had a significant impact on areas such as Phillip Island and Lakes Entrance, which are highly dependent on the visitor economy. However, the strength and diversity of Gippsland's tourist offering means that the industry will be a critical part of the region's economic recovery.

In the short to medium term, domestic visitors can help stimulate the tourist industry. There are opportunities to further develop Gippsland's tourist experiences, building on the region's existing natural advantages, agritourism potential, and strong Aboriginal culture and heritage. Improved tourist amenities can support the development of wilderness walks, food trail experiences, and tourist circuits.



Sailors Grave Brewing, Orbost
Photography: Jessica Shapiro

Important heritage sites in the land of the Gunaikurnai people include 10 parks and reserves which are managed in partnership between the Gunaikurnai People and Victorian Government through the *Gunaikurnai and Victorian Government joint management plan*. These include Buchan Caves Reserve, Lake Tyers State Park, and Turra-Bulga National Park. Numerous ancient middens mark important meeting places along the Cape Conran coastline and the region has multiple scar trees. Other important sites include the Den of Nargun, the Buchan Caves, and Burnt Bridge Reserve.

Recommendations to support the recovery of Gippsland tourism

Our regional tourism recommendations, centred on Aboriginal and nature-based tourism opportunities, aim to support sustainable growth in the regional tourism industry. A nature-based tourism strategy to guide future tourist infrastructure investment will help ensure that tourism experiences meet visitor expectations and help protect and enhance the region's natural assets. Nature-based tourism sites, such as national parks, require basic amenities and infrastructure to encourage investment in experiences, food, and accommodation services. Removing barriers to invest in national parks' tourist facilities and services will further add to the diversity of Gippsland's tourist offerings.

A Victorian Aboriginal tourist strategy, co-developed with Aboriginal communities, can further drive sustainable economic activity in Gippsland, helping preserve and promote the region's Aboriginal cultural histories and heritage sites, and create job opportunities for Aboriginal communities. The strategy should align existing joint management plans, including the *Gunaikurnai and Victorian Government joint management plan* in Aboriginal tourism infrastructure to meet Aboriginal cultural and economic development needs.

Together, these recommendations can build on investments in Gippsland's tourism infrastructure announced as part of the Victorian Government's Gippsland Tourism Recovery Package and the Building Works stimulus package, including upgrades to the East Gippsland Rail Trail and to facilities at Point Hicks Lighthouse and Bullock Island. The Victorian Government has also invested in Wilsons Promontory, to build a new visitors' centre and establish a 50,000 hectare biodiversity sanctuary.

Recommendation 81

Plan for and facilitate regional nature-based tourism investments

In the next two years, develop a Victorian nature-based tourism strategy to guide industry development and prioritise further investments. During the next 15 years, support regional tourism investment by allowing more site-specific leases for up to 49 years for infrastructure proposals that meet strict criteria and complement environmental and cultural values.

Recommendation 82

Develop a Victorian Aboriginal tourism strategy with Aboriginal communities

Support and partner with Aboriginal communities in the next two years to guide future investments in Aboriginal tourism and cultural heritage, including through joint management plans.

Enhance water security and industry resilience

The Gippsland agriculture industry supports the regional economy by producing fresh products and processed goods for domestic and international markets. Gippsland farms produce over \$2 billion in agricultural output each year and account for at least one quarter of Victoria's milk, vegetable, and beef production. The Victorian Government has provided funding for the Food Manufacturing Precinct on Alexanders Road in Morwell. The region's productive soils, mild climate, and the availability of irrigation water give Gippsland's beef, dairy, and horticulture sectors a strong comparative advantage.

The region's cooler climate and high rainfall has meant that its agriculture and food processing systems have typically been less exposed to drought compared to warmer and drier regions. However, Central and East Gippsland have experienced unusually dry seasonal conditions, and East Gippsland is currently recovering from a devastating bushfire season. In the longer term, the *Central and Gippsland sustainable water strategy* notes threats to water availability and quality in the region, including expected drier conditions and declining water storage levels.

Climate change projections indicate continued declines in rainfall combined with higher temperatures. By the 2030s, Gippsland's average maximum temperatures could increase by up to 1.8°C, while average annual rainfall is projected to decrease by 7%. By the 2050s, Gippsland could have almost twice as many days over 35°C and up to 32% more very high fire danger days.

By the 2030s



Average maximum temperatures could increase by up to 1.8°C



Average annual rainfall is projected to decrease by 7%

By the 2050s



Could have twice as many days over 35°C



Could have up to 32% more very high fire danger days

More frequent droughts and higher bushfire danger pose significant risks for Gippsland's farms and related businesses. Secure water supplies can ensure the sustainable future of the agriculture industry. Irrigation development initiatives can include the modernisation of existing infrastructure or planning for new water infrastructure projects. For example, the Victorian Government has contributed funding for Phase 2 of the Macalister Irrigation District Modernisation project. Considering long term consequences can help future planning. Gippsland stakeholders, for example, expressed mixed views about a mine rehabilitation proposal that intends to use water from the Latrobe River system to transform Latrobe Valley coal mines into lakes. Some support the proposal as a potential tourism opportunity, while others express concern at the diversion of water.

Recommendations to improve water security for the agriculture industry

Continuing to modernise irrigation systems and using all sources of water supply can further strengthen Gippsland's water security. Improving Gippsland's network of emergency water supply points can further enhance the agricultural industry's climate change resilience. This means farmers can get water as rainfall continues to decline, benefitting Gippsland's high-value agriculture sectors and supporting continued growth.

The recommendations build on the Victorian Government's water infrastructure investments to provide long-term support for projects to modernise and replace essential water infrastructure.

Recommendation 13

Consider all water supply sources

Consider all water sources for supply augmentation, including identifying and addressing barriers to purified recycled drinking water within the next 10 years.

When planning for future water supply, investigate all options including, but not limited to recycled water, seawater desalination, stormwater harvesting and better use of the water grid.

Recommendation 16

Strengthen agricultural water security by modernising irrigation

In the next 30 years, contribute funding toward planning and delivery of water infrastructure and irrigation modernisation projects across Victoria.

Recommendation 17

Upgrade Victoria's emergency water network

In the next year, assess the condition, capacity and security of Victoria's emergency water supply point network, and upgrade or replace inadequate supply points. Clarify ongoing responsibility for monitoring, maintenance and funding to secure a resilient network.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* (section 1.2) for additional recommendations on water and climate.

Improve freight networks

The rail freight network has more assets in average, poor, or end-of-life condition, compared to regional passenger rail. Maintaining and enhancing transport infrastructure will help future industry development, by creating cheaper, faster connections between producers and their processors and markets. Gippsland's stakeholders also express a need for improvements on major road freight routes, and better connections to ports.

Recommendations to improve freight networks

Our regional transport recommendations aim to provide funding certainty for road and rail maintenance and upgrade programs. They seek to leverage Gippsland's road and rail freight networks to better support the needs of the region's businesses. This helps improve access, connectivity, and safety while also reducing supply chain costs, to allow businesses to remain competitive.

Recommendation 78

Deliver long-term funding certainty for regional road maintenance and upgrades

Within two years, specify clear levels of service for each type of regional road and bridge. Following this, dedicate a 10-year funding program to sustainably fund Victorian Government regional road and bridge maintenance and upgrades to meet these service levels. Funding should be prioritised based on improving safety, decreasing vehicle emissions, and lifting productivity.

Recommendation 79

Fund and plan for ongoing regional rail freight network development and maintenance

In the next year, fund a 30-year periodic regional freight rail maintenance program, informed by a publicly available network development and asset management plan. Using the plan, thoroughly determine the feasibility of the next major regional freight upgrade within five years.

Managing Gippsland's coasts

Gippsland's coastline is a major asset and contributes to the regional economy through commercial fishing, shipping, and energy, as well as tourism and related services. However, climate change is affecting coastal protection assets at Lakes Entrance, Mallacoota, and Jam Jerrup, and coastal erosion is threatening beaches at Phillip Island and Inverloch.

Coastal erosion is likely to increase with rising sea levels and storms, and many of Gippsland's coastal assets are deteriorating or approaching the end of their life. This is endangering Gippsland's coast, and the economies and communities it supports. Coastal communities and iconic tourism assets need careful and considered management to mitigate the impact of changing shoreline conditions.

Regional stakeholders gave examples of possible coastal resilience projects to consider including wet sand fencing, rock revetments, and timber groynes, which have previously produced successful results in Cowes East and Inverloch.

Recommendation to protect Gippsland's coast from the impacts of climate change

Changing planning approaches for coastal adaptation, and investing in targeted coastal protection activities will help address climate-related issues faced by Gippsland's coastal communities. The recommendation aims to provide funding certainty to enable a more considered approach to managing coastal assets.

Recommendation 18

Invest in protection and adaptation for Victoria's coasts

In the next year, develop clear guidance on coastal adaptation planning, including thresholds, triggers, and planning guidelines to support local area decision-making. Invest in coastal protection upgrades and maintenance, including beach and dune protection and rehabilitation, and storm surge protection, over the next eight years.



Betka Beach, Mallacoota



Facilitate recycling and resource recovery infrastructure

Victoria can transform its resource and recycling sector to recover up to 90% of our waste with \$1 billion of investment in infrastructure from both government and the private sector by 2039. There are currently dozens of resource recovery centres across Victoria, of varying capacity and capability, that collect materials from their local areas for transport and further recovery. There is an opportunity to support a resource recovery centre network with facilities that are more strategically located and better resourced – so that the costs of transporting materials are reduced and materials, such as compost, can be made closer to their end users, such as agriculture.

The supply of recyclable materials has not been matched by demand for them. More reliable markets for priority materials – recyclable glass, plastic, paper and card, organics, tyres and e-waste – would support economic development, help address the stockpiling of recovered materials, and reduce Victoria’s reliance on landfill. Markets for these materials vary greatly, presenting different challenges for each material. Ongoing research and development can help to identify new potential uses for recycled materials, either as direct substitutes for virgin materials or new uses.

Recommendations to facilitate regional recycling industries

Infrastructure Victoria’s *Advice on recycling and resource recovery infrastructure*, suggested upgrading or building new processing infrastructure for six priority materials – plastics, paper, cardboard, glass, organics, tyres and e-waste – can create over 5000 new jobs and create high quality, recycled products for use in major infrastructure projects, manufacturing and agriculture. Regional Victoria stands to benefit most from significantly increased processing capacity, with the advice recommending 52 out of 87 new or upgraded facilities be located outside of metropolitan Melbourne.

More recycling and resource recovery infrastructure is likely to be needed in the Gippsland region. This includes materials recovery facility upgrades, plastic processing plants, glass sand or aggregate plants, solar PV panel reprocessing, and organic open windrow and composting facilities. By processing materials from both Melbourne and local areas, regional Victoria can provide products, closer to end users, reducing transport costs and creating new jobs and services.

Recommendation 28

Facilitate improved recycling infrastructure for priority materials

In the next year, focus efforts to increase and upgrade waste processing infrastructure on six priority materials. Facilitate increased recovery and reprocessing capacity and capability for paper and card, plastics, and organics by 2025. Revisit funding mechanisms and align recycling infrastructure with land use settings.

Recommendation 29

Strengthen end markets for recycled materials

Continue to deliver market development for recycled materials by updating standards and specifications to be performance-based rather than material-based, and explicitly require the Victorian public sector to use recycled products where feasible. In the next five years, support research, development and demonstrations to build confidence and demand for recycled products.



Please refer to *Victoria’s infrastructure strategy* (section 1.5) for additional recommendations on building a circular economy for waste and recycling.

Better connect the regions

Redesign public transport

Gippsland’s size, dispersed settlement pattern, and the relative isolation of its rural areas create distinct transport challenges. The western fringe is within commuting distance of Melbourne, giving those residents greater access to services compared with eastern Gippsland, where longer distances make access to services and jobs more difficult. Gippsland residents are highly dependent on cars to get around. Less than 2% of the region’s workforce travel to work by public transport, and access to public transport across the region is low in all local government areas. Just 9% of residents in South Gippsland live within ready access of public transport.

Gippsland stakeholders have highlighted many transport issues within the region, affecting residents’ ability to access work, health, education, and services which are increasingly focused in larger centres. These include:

- \\ Increasing congestion on the Gippsland rail line as the population in areas bordering Melbourne continues to grow.
- \\ A need for more frequent buses between smaller towns and regional hubs – for example Warragul and Drouin.
- \\ Frequency and reliability issues with V/Line services.
- \\ Little co-ordination between bus and rail services, combined with limited timetables during peak and business hours, meaning services cannot be used by those living in rural towns to commute to work in regional centres.
- \\ Poor connections to health, education, and training centres from surrounding areas including for example: public transport from Bass Coast to the major service centres, particularly for younger people accessing TAFE.

Community transport provides an alternative to public transport within the region. For example, the Victorian Government’s Flexible Local Transport Solutions Program funds charter buses so students can travel to vocational education providers in Korumburra and Leongatha. The services run several days each week, picking up students from Phillip Island, Leongatha, Wonthaggi, and Inverloch. With no other public transport service available, the service allows local students to attend training. Access to these training opportunities improves young people’s employment prospects and opens career pathways which would otherwise be unavailable. However, as a pilot program, funding is set to cease in 2021.

Those without their own means of transport face significant disadvantage in accessing jobs and services. Timely and reliable access to transport is essential for Gippsland residents to access the healthcare, education, and services they need and to foster social inclusion among more vulnerable residents.

Recommendation to enable viable transport options across Gippsland

Our recommendation to reform public transport focuses on improving transport options within Gippsland. It seeks to develop solutions which integrate traditional public transport with more innovative, flexible transport options, such as community transport, on-demand services, and the school bus network. These can deliver services which respond to community needs. Ultimately, Gippsland transport services need long-term certainty so Gippsland residents can access education, health, and other services. These services are increasingly centralised in Moe, Morwell, and Traralgon as well as other regional centres such as Bairnsdale, Sale, and Warragul.

The Victorian Government is delivering better connections between Gippsland and Melbourne through its *Regional network development plan*. It plans for a minimum frequency of a train every 20 minutes at peak times and every 40 minutes in off peak periods between Melbourne and Traralgon, as well as five services each weekday to Bairnsdale.

Recommendation 83

Redesign regional public transport to meet local needs

In the next five years, redesign existing regional transport services so they are integrated, based on regional needs assessments, and sustainably funded. Use significant technological and reform opportunities to deliver innovative service models that meet local needs.



Strengthen telecommunications and digital connectivity

The *Gippsland digital plan* identifies the region's lack of adequate, affordable business-grade telecommunications services for regional businesses, along with poor mobile coverage, limited Wi-Fi networks, and digital skills shortages. Digital connectivity constrains Gippsland businesses from making full use of new technologies, which was particularly challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Improvements to digital infrastructure and connectivity can enable productivity gains in farm businesses and processing facilities, and meet demands across the health, education, and local government sectors.

Poor mobile quality and coverage have implications for public safety, affecting emergency services and individuals. People need to access telecommunications during emergencies, including to make calls for emergency assistance, access relevant mobile apps, and receive text-based emergency alerts. The 2019-20 summer bushfires highlighted the vulnerabilities of Gippsland's telecommunications infrastructure. Several towns lost communications, some of which were also isolated by disrupted road access.

Poor digital connectivity also impacts liveability and community safety in the region. Gippsland's residents have lower rates of internet connection, inferior internet speeds, and less reliable mobile coverage. One in five Gippsland households do not have internet access compared with an average of one in seven across Victoria. The *Gippsland digital plan* highlights a persistent divide in the quality of mobile services available to regional users compared to Melbourne. Gippsland's mobile users have registered 496 black spots across the region, almost one fifth of the total registered in Victoria.

As businesses and services increasingly move online, poor digital connectivity creates a barrier to services and to addressing disadvantage. Low digital literacy has limited many people's ability to adapt to new ways of learning, living, and working. This has increased inequity for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, who may have less capability, resources, and access to technology. This points to further need to build digital capability and literacy of Gippsland residents.

Gippsland's Foster Library is an innovative example. It is the first library in Victoria to open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. From August 2019, it gave approved library members secure, after-hours access to books, workspaces, and free Wi-Fi. This model responded to limited community internet access and requests for longer opening hours. By the end of March 2020, Foster Library had a 14% increase in active memberships and a 54% increase in visits compared with the prior year. There is potential for this model to be expanded to other towns across the region and the state.

Internet of Things (IoT) enhancement is also a regional priority, which helps underpin future productivity in the region's agriculture industries. IoT enables devices embedded with sensors to connect to and interact with each other over the internet, collecting information and monitoring data to help farmers make more informed decisions. Research suggests that digital agriculture could increase the gross value of agricultural production by up to 25%. The Victorian Government's On-Farm IoT trial in Maffra is supporting dairy farms to be digitally connected from point of production to point of processing, using real-time data to inform milking and management.

Recommendations to improve digital connectivity

Our recommendations maintain the focus on improving Gippsland's fixed broadband and mobile services. Improved connectivity will ensure that more Gippsland businesses can take advantage of digital opportunities. Reliable and high-speed internet connections can help businesses operate and compete from any region, placing businesses in a stronger competitive position and help withstand future crises. These recommendations also complement the Victorian Government's enhanced broadband project to deliver high speed business grade services in regional Victoria, with a pilot in Morwell.

Recommendation 84

Address regional Victoria's digital connectivity gaps

In the next five years, continue delivering regional digital connectivity improvements, and monitor and review the need for further government investment following the roll-out of the Digital Future Now initiative.

Recommendation 85

Improve regional telecommunications infrastructure resilience

In the next five years, develop more resilient regional telecommunications infrastructure so communities can stay safe during emergencies, including better mobile coverage, back-up systems and power supply, and emergency mobile roaming.

Recommendation 86

Fund regional libraries to provide better internet access

In the next year, start a five-year funding program for libraries in regional towns and rural areas to improve community access to fast, free internet services, leveraging existing library infrastructure.

Foster regional Victorians' health, safety, and inclusion

Improve access to healthcare

Gippsland residents experience relatively high levels of family stress, mental health issues, and family violence, placing pressure on available health and support services in the region. Gippsland reports above average numbers of mental health clients in all its local government areas, particularly Latrobe, combined with relatively high levels of drug and alcohol treatment in many areas. Education and employment rates are also an issue in the region, with some 25% of young people in the Latrobe Valley aged 15 to 19 not engaged in education, training, or employment.

Stakeholders flagged that bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to poor mental health outcomes. Increased social isolation, anxiety, job instability, and pressures in the home may have long-term mental health impacts. Providing local services, and integrated care for people experiencing both drug and alcohol addiction and mental health difficulties, helps meet current and future demand across the region. Stakeholders also identify that West Gippsland Hospital lacks the staff and infrastructure to effectively meet demand, which has reportedly doubled since 2014-15, as the hospital services one of the fastest growing regional municipalities.

Across the region, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide services to and promote the rights of Aboriginal people. Gippsland's large Aboriginal population is projected to grow 50% between 2018 and 2028, which could lead to more demand for Aboriginal and other services in the region. The combination of increasing client numbers and inadequate infrastructure is restricting the ability of Gippsland's ACCOs to provide timely and effective service delivery.

Recommendations to improve health outcomes for Gippsland residents

Our recommendations collectively aim to improve access to health services for Gippsland residents. Using innovation in healthcare delivery can expand the use of technology in service provision, to better connect regional communities with specialist health services. Gippsland stakeholders have highlighted that it has proven particularly difficult to attract and retain health workers in this region.

A plan for future investment in Aboriginal community controlled infrastructure aims to respond to the current and future infrastructure needs of Gippsland's Aboriginal communities. The region also requires improved access to mental health facilities, to respond to gaps in local service availability and provision. Our recommendations build on recent government commitments to expand the current Phillip Island Health Hub to become a community hospital that will provide a wider range of public health and urgent care services, as well as funds for a new youth prevention and recovery care unit, additional drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation beds in Traralgon, and outreach mental health services in Bairnsdale, Central and West Gippsland.

Recommendation 25

Use innovation to deliver better models of health care

Within two years, help slow the growth in demand for hospital infrastructure by developing a comprehensive statewide health innovation strategy, supported by a funding over five years to promote and progressively implement better models of health care.

Recommendation 67

Co-design an Aboriginal community controlled infrastructure plan

In the next year, start a co-design process with Aboriginal Victorians to develop a plan to guide investment in Aboriginal community-controlled infrastructure to meet current and future social, economic and cultural needs.

Recommendation 70

Deliver infrastructure for a more responsive and integrated mental health system

In the next year, establish a dedicated infrastructure fund to support more responsive and integrated mental health and wellbeing services, consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.



Improve and better use community and council infrastructure

Gippsland faces various challenges in ensuring that residents have access to the services that they need, including:

- East Gippsland and Wellington's dispersed rural councils have a relatively small ratepayer base, affecting their financial viability and ability to maintain services and facilities.
- Latrobe is the seventh most disadvantaged local government area in Victoria, leading to a relatively high demand for health and community services.
- Baw Baw and Bass Coast are experiencing high population growth and development, increasing pressure on services and existing community facilities.

Climate change adds further complexity to the challenges facing local governments and communities. Bushfires have had a devastating impact on Gippsland. The region is exposed to higher temperatures, more days of extreme heat, declining forecast rainfall, and continued catastrophic bushfires risk. In the Latrobe City local government area, for instance, fire and extreme weather have affected all four major town centres and several smaller communities. Successive emergencies have resulted in calls from local stakeholders to establish a network of accessible, climate-adapted facilities in the region to accommodate and support residents during emergency events.

Recommendations to make better use of community infrastructure

Recommendations for better use of community facilities seek to support regions and local governments in providing fit for purpose social infrastructure which can respond to local needs. Gippsland stakeholders support shared facilities to continue to provide services, including proposals for a community hub in Drouin. Service planning can help identify gaps in existing infrastructure, or opportunities for shared facilities, supported by funding to retrofit, repurpose, or retire existing community facilities. Integrating transport planning within planning for service delivery will ensure that people can access essential services. Creating climate-adapted facilities for rural communities can support local governments to reduce the health impacts of exposure to heat and prolonged smoke from bushfires.

Recommendation 19

Build back better after emergencies

In the next year, consider policy changes and funding mechanisms so high priority public infrastructure destroyed by emergencies is built to a more resilient standard or in less vulnerable locations.

Recommendation 88

Deliver multipurpose shared social service facilities in the regions

In the next year, start regional planning for social services to identify opportunities for multipurpose shared services facilities, then deliver them where appropriate, over the next five years, in partnership with local governments and community organisations.

Recommendation 89

Update community infrastructure

Fund regional councils in the next five years to update, repurpose or retire outdated community infrastructure for better service delivery.

Recommendation 90

Create climate-adapted facilities for rural communities

In the next five years, fund local governments to plan and help deliver a network of designated, accessible climate-adapted community facilities, to manage the health impacts of extreme heat and bushfire smoke.



Inverloch Community Hub

Address social housing challenges

Stakeholders have told us that there are many housing issues for people living on low incomes in Gippsland. People on low incomes are being squeezed out of the private rental market into insecure accommodation or homelessness, due to declining housing affordability and population growth.

At 33%, a higher proportion of rental households are experiencing rental stress in Gippsland than any other Victorian region. This rises to 38% in Bass Coast, the highest rate in Victoria. Only one third of new rental properties in Bass Coast and Baw Baw shires are affordable. Gippsland also has high family violence rates, helping drive demand for respite accommodation and social housing. Gippsland has the second highest rate of family violence in Victoria. Family violence rates in East Gippsland and Latrobe are almost three times the Victorian average.

Stakeholders also report that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the shortage of housing stock in Gippsland, as higher numbers of Melburnians moved to Gippsland as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders also told us headworks costs are higher, and house and land packages are lower in value in regional Victoria, when compared to Melbourne. They told us this discourages investment in regional housing.

Given the loss of housing through bushfires and the rising cost of housing in the region, there is a need to improve access to social housing, particularly in regional centres with proximity to transport, jobs, healthcare, and other services.

Recommendations to enhance access to affordable, fit for purpose housing

Expanding social housing in regional centres, in locations with good access to transport, work, education, and services, can improve Gippsland residents' access to affordable housing.

Establishing Youth Foyers seeks to respond to the challenges young people. Gippsland stakeholders strongly supported the Youth Foyer model, including Morwell as a potential location. Youth Foyers provide integrated learning and accommodation services, enabling vulnerable young people to successfully transition from school to work, and helping break cycles of disadvantage.

Making social housing suitable for changing climates responds to the need for adequate heating and cooling in the region's social housing, building on Victorian Government funding allocations for energy efficiency upgrades in social housing properties. This includes installing split system air-conditioning to better regulate temperatures in the home.

Together, these recommendations seek to ensure a long-term focus on social housing provision following the roll out of the Victorian Government's four-year Big Housing Build program, which includes minimum guaranteed investments already committed for Bass Coast Shire, Baw Baw Shire and the City of Latrobe.

Recommendation 55

Rapidly renew old public housing

Rapidly renew dilapidated public housing properties to improve functionality, accessibility and energy efficiency with a priority to renew at least half of all older low-rise apartments and older three bedroom detached dwellings by 2031.

Recommendation 92

Fund more Youth Foyers in regional Victoria

Fund at least six new Youth Foyers in regional Victoria by 2026, to better use existing education infrastructure and support vulnerable young people.

Recommendation 93

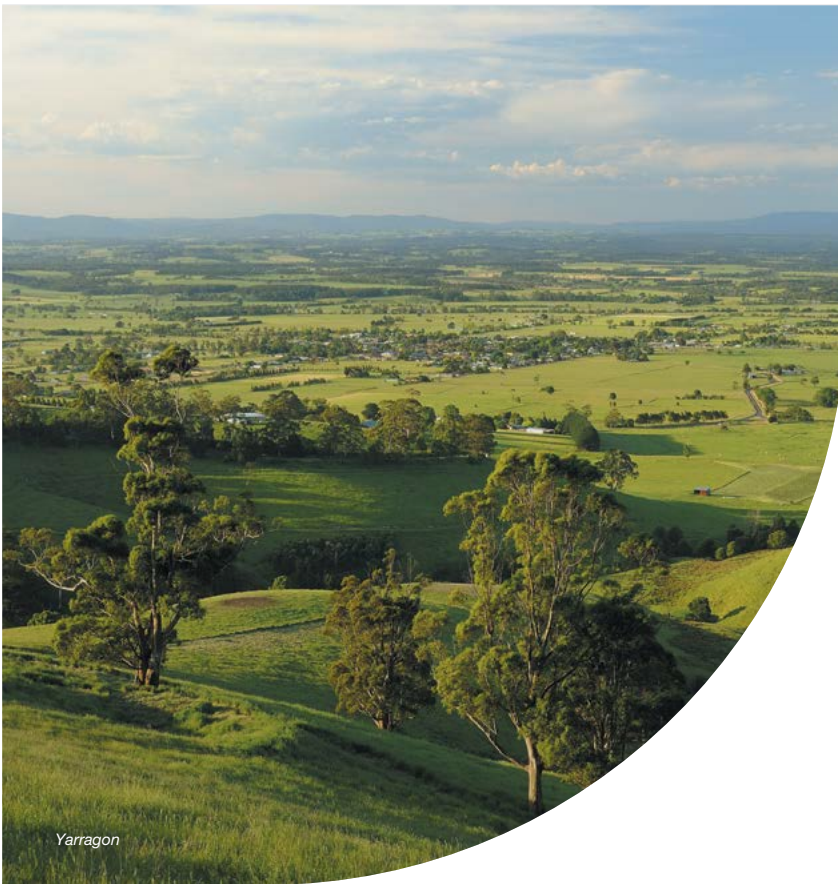
Expand social housing in regional centres, in locations with good access

Focus social housing investments in regional centres, near transport and services, for better access to health, social and economic support.

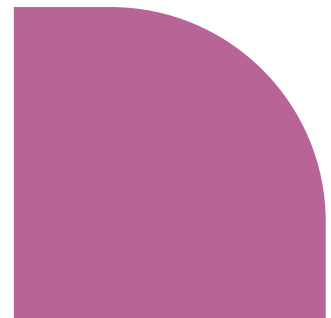
Recommendation 94

Make social housing suitable for changing local climates

Continue to deliver a long-term program of modifying social housing to be climate-resilient by improving the energy efficiency and energy affordability of residences.



Yarragon



This publication may be of assistance to you, but Infrastructure Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence that may arise from you relying on any information in this publication. You should seek appropriately qualified advice before making any decisions regarding your particular project.

Printed on 100% recycled paper

August 2021

© Copyright Infrastructure Victoria 2021

Except for any logos, emblems, trademarks, figures and photography, this document is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence. It is a condition of this Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 licence that you must give credit to the original author, who is Infrastructure Victoria.

This document is also available at infrastructurevictoria.com.au.

ISBN 978-1-925632-58-3 (pdf/online/MS word)



Mallacoota