

Our Reference: JM
Your Reference:

25 May 2023

██████████
██████████
Infrastructure Victoria

Via email: enquiries@infrastructurevictoria.com.au

Dear ██████████

30 Year Infrastructure Strategy Review

Council was pleased to participate in a regional forum to provide input into the IV 30 year strategy last week. During that forum it was advised that submissions on the strategy could be made until the end of this month. I therefore provide this submission, on behalf of Council, which reviews the “Regional Priorities – Wimmera Southern Mallee Summary” extract from the 2021-51 Infrastructure Strategy.

As an overview, nearly all of the recommendations from the 2021 document remain relevant, and little if any progress appears to have been made on them. Council is concerned that Government investment in this region to deliver on the recommendations has not been proportionate to the region’s needs.

Some significant changes in the region’s status since the 2021 Strategy have included:

- A deepening of the housing crisis, not just in terms of social housing, but generally. This status will be under further pressure in the next few short years based on the very probably commencement of the Avonbank mineral sands mine and other mineral sands developments in the region.
- The further jobs associated with this mining activity will have flow-on effects across the region’s social infrastructure needs, for example in relation to child care, health and education.
- Related to this is the downgrade of services at the Wimmera Base Hospital in Horsham associated with its centralisation to Ballarat, as part of the new Grampians Health organisation. This centralisation has seen the loss of some services which used to be provided at Horsham, and the concern is that further vital health services will become more remote for our community.

The following specific comments are made in relation to some of the recommendations from the 2021 document, in the order presented in the summary document.

- **Recommendation 78** Deliver long-term funding certainty for regional road maintenance and upgrades.

This has not advanced. In contrast, the region is experiencing a general degradation in the standard of arterial roads in particular. In places there are long sections, some close to 10 km long, where speed limits have been reduced solely due to road condition due to a lack of maintenance. Further, vital funding to upgrade unsafe arterial roads which have narrow seal widths is not being provided. This is increasingly becoming an issue with the growing requirement for detours associated with accidents on the Western Highway, which often force large volumes of heavy vehicle traffic onto secondary roads which are not suited to this traffic.

In relation to upgrades, ongoing duplication of the Western Highway remains a regional priority, initially to Stawell and eventually to the South Australian border as traffic volumes, in particular freight, increase. Related to this is the need for an Alternative Truck Route to take the high levels of truck traffic out of Horsham's CBD area. Council is working on this with DTP at present, with an expectation of a proposal being developed by the end of 2023.

- **Recommendation 79** Fund and plan for ongoing regional rail freight network development and maintenance

This recommendation remains relevant, for example in relation to the incomplete delivery of the Murray Basin Rail Project, the need to upgrade the Victorian-owned Maroona-Portland rail line, and upgrades at Doon Freight Hub (Wimmera Intermodal Freight Terminal) and the Port of Portland to facilitate mineral sands exports.

- **Recommendation 03** Augment electricity transmission for renewable energy and resilience

This remains relevant. There are further renewable energy projects on hold in the region due to the lack of grid capacity.

- **Recommendation 80** Upgrade power supply for agriculture and regional industry

A key industrial development in Horsham recently experienced a significant delay to its commencement owing to the bureaucratic process associated with expansion of the electricity supply network. An improved forward look planning process is required to facilitate timely investment in new industry.

- **Recommendation 13** Consider all water supply sources

Good progress has been made on this recommendation with the initiation of the Smartwater project by GWMWater. This also has benefitted Council through the Integrated Water Management project delivered through DEECA. Further investment will be required in coming years to deliver on the objectives of this program.

There is currently not a recommendation in the water section relating to supply of potable water to all towns. There are still some smaller towns in the region that do not have drinking water standard supplies. This should be considered as a recommendation for upgrading the region.

- **Recommendation 83** Redesign regional public transport to meet local needs

A critical need in this regard is passenger rail services to Horsham. For example a rail-shuttle between Horsham and Ararat would enable connection to the existing services provided from Ararat to Ballarat and Melbourne.

- **Recommendation 84** Address regional Victoria's digital connectivity gaps

There are still significant black holes in mobile phone and data service coverage. With the increasing reliance on the internet for information and basic services, such as telehealth, this lack of, or poor service in some areas creates an equity of service issue.

- **Recommendation 19** Build back better after emergencies

The major flooding experienced in much of northern and western Victoria in 2022 highlights this issue. While there has been a policy shift at the national level and some minor funding made available to build resilience into recovery, the level of commitment is not commensurate with the need. There appears to be significant merit in enabling assets to be re-built to incorporate resilience, rather than rehabilitating them to the same standard, only to be damaged in subsequent, repeated emergency events.

- **Recommendation 94** Make social housing suitable for changing local climates

One aspect of this is to incorporate passive solar design as a requirement to improve the efficiency of new homes.

Finally, Council has its own specific infrastructure priorities that it is seeking to develop. Chief amongst these is the City to River project which aims to address economic, liveability, amenity, and climate change adaptation issues, by providing enhancements to and a stronger connection between Horsham's CBD area and the Wimmera River, including some key recreation areas in this precinct. Further Government investment in this project is vital to that Horsham can provide the regional-level services associated with its role as the regional capital.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. Please contact me, if you wish further information about any of these points.

Yours sincerely



