

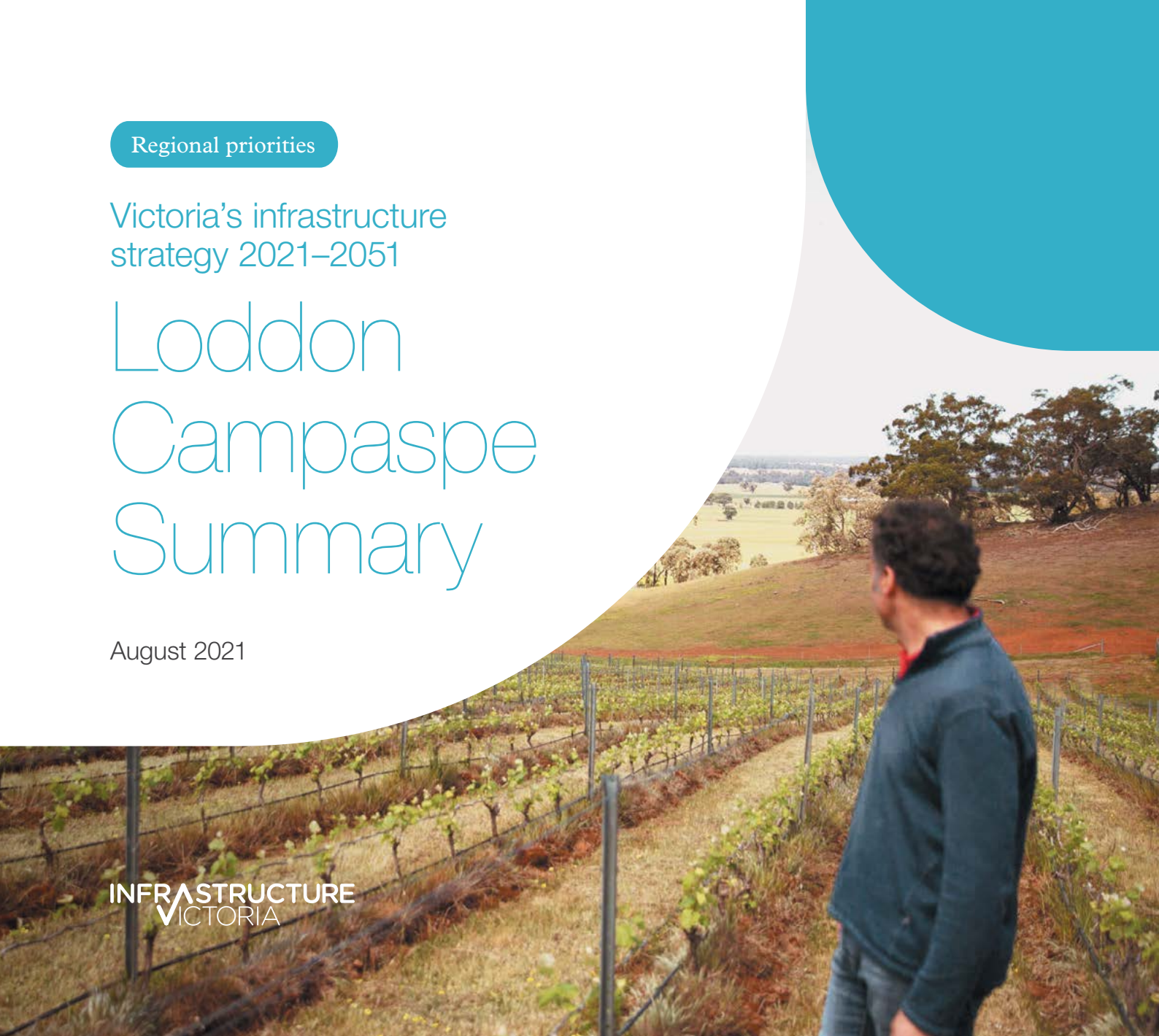


Regional priorities

Victoria's infrastructure  
strategy 2021–2051

# Loddon Campaspe Summary

August 2021



## 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](http://infrastructurevictoria.com.au)

### Aboriginal acknowledgment

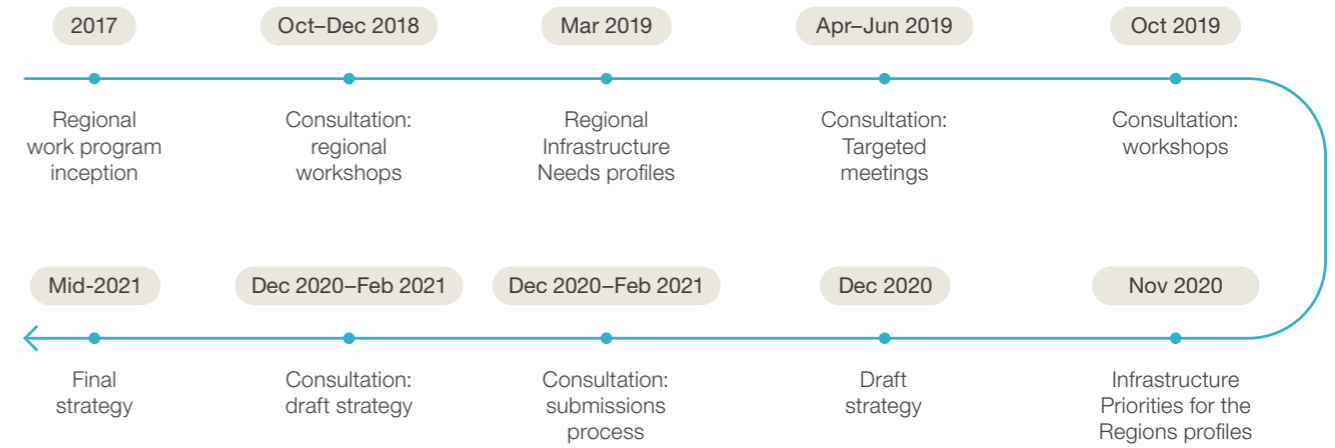
Infrastructure Victoria acknowledges the traditional owners of country in Victoria and pays respect to their elders past and present, as well as elders of other Aboriginal communities. We acknowledge the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurong and Yorta Yorta peoples, whose traditional lands are in the Loddon Campaspe 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 Loddon Campaspe 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 Loddon Campaspe 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 *Loddon Campaspe regional profile*, a *Loddon Campaspe region industry profile*, and a *Factsheet on Loddon Campaspe regional disadvantage*, all available on our website. We used this evidence to develop strategy recommendations that can apply to the Loddon Campaspe region.

### Engagement timeline



During our draft strategy consultation, we provided more opportunities for Loddon Campaspe communities and stakeholders to offer feedback, including through surveys, submissions, and hosting a Loddon Campaspe regional roundtable discussion.

Combined, this comprehensive process of consultation and engagement guided the development of this Loddon Campaspe regional summary and the relevant strategy recommendations. It focusses on infrastructure-related opportunities to build on Loddon Campaspe'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 Loddon Campaspe.



## Overview

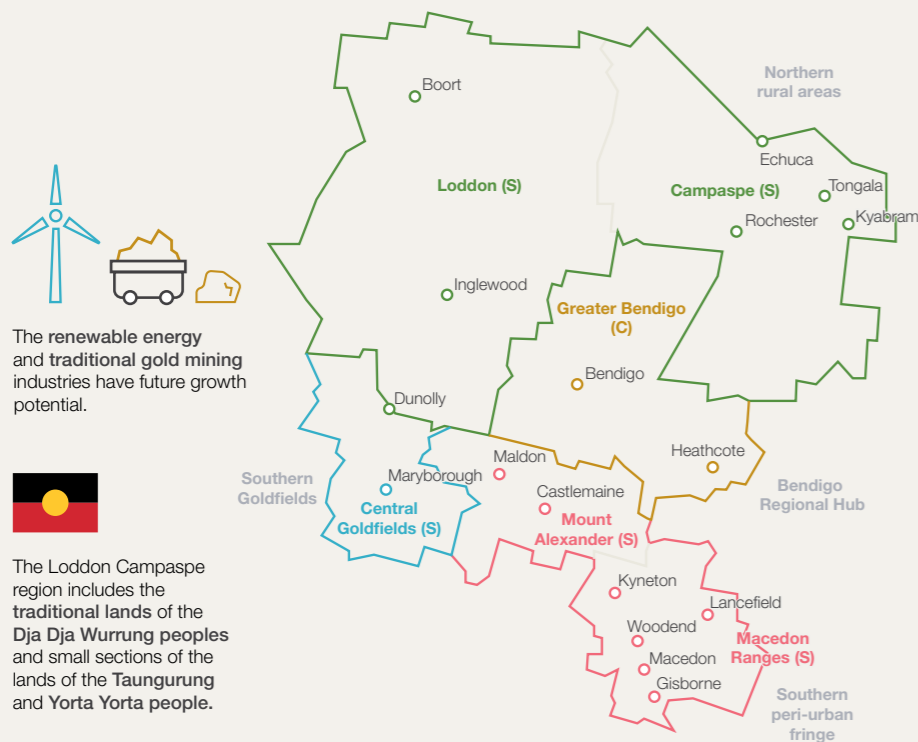
Loddon Campaspe is in central Victoria. Victoria's fourth largest city, Bendigo, is at its heart. The region is a major producer of dairy, sheep and beef and is well known for specialised food and drink production. The mix of agricultural industries creates an agricultural processing and services hub for central Victoria. Loddon Campaspe has a diverse economy relative to Victoria's other agricultural regions. It has established service industries, including finance and insurance, health, professional services and tourism. Bendigo's modern diversified economy provides another economic strength. The renewable energy and traditional gold mining industries have future growth potential.

The Loddon Campaspe region includes the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples and small sections of the lands of the Taungurung and Yorta Yorta people. The region has experienced strong population growth, concentrated in Bendigo and the southern part of the region which lies within Melbourne's peri-urban fringe. This contrasts with declining populations in the more rural parts of the region to the north and west. Echuca is the main centre in the region's north-east, with the Murray River forming part of the New South Wales border. As a result, Loddon Campaspe provides services to, and receives services from, New South Wales, and there are considerable freight movements between the two.



Echuca Wharf

### The regions of Loddon Campaspe



The renewable energy and traditional gold mining industries have future growth potential.



The Loddon Campaspe region includes the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples and small sections of the lands of the Taungurung and Yorta Yorta people.



The region is a major producer of dairy, sheep and beef.



The region features established service industries, including **finance and insurance, health, professional services and tourism.**

## Enhance market access and regional economic growth

### Unlock industry growth opportunities

Limited transmission infrastructure is constraining renewable energy development opportunities in Loddon Campaspe, particularly solar. The Loddon Mallee renewable energy roadmap outlines electricity transmission grid investments to realise the region's solar and wind energy potential. Large and small scale solar, bioenergy and wind now locally generate 69% of the region's energy needs. This equates to nearly 16% of Victoria's current renewable generation capacity. The roadmap suggests that within the next five years, the region can meet its own energy needs and export power elsewhere.

Electricity infrastructure has been identified as a potential constraint on the region's more established industries, such as meat, grain and dairy processing. Where outdated single-wire earth return power lines serve farms and processing facilities, changing industry practices and more energy intensive equipment are leading to power capacity constraints, limiting production and preventing business expansion.

### Recommendations to remove energy infrastructure barriers in Loddon Campaspe

Infrastructure Victoria supports the Australian Energy Market Operator's proposed transmission extension to better connect Victoria with New South Wales, and which can unlock significant renewable energy resources. The Victorian Government's preferred route, known as KerangLink, would increase the ability for renewable generation to connect in the Murray River Renewable Energy Zone in the region's north. Councils in this region are highly supportive of KerangLink, with many planning permits already granted to generate renewable energy.

Co-funding power supply upgrades removes constraints associated with outdated power supply infrastructure, unlocking new investment opportunities for regional businesses. 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.

#### 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 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.

## Enhance water security and industry resilience

Loddon Campaspe is a major producer of dairy, sheep meat and beef, and is also well known for specialised production, such as shiraz in the Heathcote wine region. Agricultural production is valued at more than \$1 billion a year. Loddon Campaspe's food processing sector is worth around \$2.7 billion, making it the largest in regional Victoria. The region's strength in agriculture and food processing exposes its economy to increases in drought and extreme weather.

By the 2030s, Loddon Campaspe's average maximum temperatures could increase by up to 1.7°C, while average annual rainfall is projected to decrease by 10%. By the 2050s, Loddon Campaspe could have twice as many days over 35°C and up to 62% more very high fire danger days. The region's industry diversity can help it manage the potential economic impacts of climate change. Coliban Water has suggested that climate change is already having an impact on the region's water infrastructure and investment levels are constraining its resilience. Continued improvements to water and irrigation infrastructure can increase water security in the region.

### Recommendations to improve water security for Loddon Campaspe's agriculture industry

Strengthening water security, by using all sources of water supply, modernising irrigation systems, and upgrading Victoria's emergency water supply network can ensure farmers can get water as rainfalls continue to decline. These recommendations will benefit Loddon Campaspe's agriculture and related businesses, helping to support continued industry growth.

#### 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.

#### By the 2030s



Average maximum temperatures could increase by up to 1.7°C



Average annual rainfall is projected to decrease by 10%

#### By the 2050s



Could have twice as many days over 35°C



Could have up to 62% more very high fire danger days



Aerial view of Lake Eppalock

## Foster tourism in Loddon Campaspe

Tourists spent around \$1.2 billion in the Loddon Campaspe region in 2019. The region's cultural institutions and events attract tourists, such as Bendigo Art Gallery, Castlemaine State Festival and the Riverboats Music Festival, diverse food and wine experiences, and nature-based tourism opportunities, for example the Murray River and the Castlemaine Diggings National Park. The Bendigo Art Gallery is planning for a major expansion, to add learning spaces, expand visitor spaces and provide a dedicated place to keep its Dja Dja Wurrung collection.

The *Loddon Campaspe economic growth strategy* identifies further development opportunities for the region's nature-based tourism and agritourism, building on the region's existing natural advantages and strengths in artisanal food and drink production. Better supporting infrastructure and amenities can stimulate continued future growth in the industry, such as better visitor facilities, signage, trail and track development and cycling routes.

Important Aboriginal cultural heritage assets lie within Loddon Campaspe. Rivers and waterways are particularly important heritage sites for the Dja Dja Wurrung people and have economic, social, environmental and spiritual value. Sites include the Loddon, Coliban, Campaspe, Avoca and Avon Rivers, and the Boort, Eppalock and Laanecoorie Lakes. The Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board manages six parks held as Aboriginal Title and managed through the *Dja Dja Wurrung joint management plan*: Greater Bendigo and Kara Kara National Parks, Paddys Ranges State Forest, Kooyoora State Park, Hepburn Regional Park, and Wehla Nature Conservation Reserve. Dja Dja Wurrung artefacts continue to be identified across the Loddon Campaspe region, particularly as development of infrastructure and housing expands.

### Recommendations to support a recovery in regional tourism

Nature-based and Aboriginal tourism opportunities can help support sustainable growth in the region's tourism industry. A nature-based tourism strategy can guide future investment in the region's tourist infrastructure. It can help ensure tourism experiences, supporting facilities and infrastructure meet visitor expectations, and protect and enhance the region's natural assets. Nature-based tourism sites, including national parks, require basic amenities and infrastructure to encourage investment in experiences, food and accommodation services. The region has already identified nature based tourism priorities such as constructing and activating iconic trails and improving the forest management for greater appreciation and visitor use. Removing investment barriers in national parks will help encourage investment in tourist facilities and services, further adding to the diversity of Loddon Campaspe's tourist experiences.

Co-developing a Victorian Aboriginal tourist strategy with Aboriginal communities can help further drive sustainable economic activity and employment in Loddon Campaspe, as well as help preserve and promote the region's Aboriginal cultural histories and heritage sites. The strategy should align existing joint management plans, including the *Dja Dja Wurrung joint management plan*, and guide Victorian Government investment in Aboriginal tourism infrastructure to meet Aboriginal cultural and economic development needs.

These recommendations can build on the Victorian Government's tourism infrastructure investments in Loddon Campaspe. This includes developing Echuca's entertainment precinct to better share Echuca's Aboriginal and riverboat heritage, and new shared use trails to link towns in the Macedon Ranges.

#### 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 future 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.



## Improve freight networks

Loddon Campaspe is well connected to Melbourne and other economic centres by road and rail, including freight connections to ports in Melbourne, Geelong and Portland. As a border region, it is also well connected to New South Wales. Transport network improvements continue to present opportunities for industries operating across Loddon Campaspe, including agriculture, manufacturing, mining and energy. This includes new transport links to new markets and improving and maintaining existing roads and rail networks.

Better road access outside of regional centres can enhance links between primary producers, processors and markets in the agri-food industry and support potential future development in the region's mining industry. Better rural roads and supporting infrastructure can better connect tourists with the region's agritourism.

### Recommendations to better connect Loddon Campaspe businesses with processors and markets

The original Murray Basin Rail project aimed to improve freight routes through the Loddon Campaspe region to Melbourne and regional ports. Many stakeholders expressed major concerns with its reduced scope. Providing funding certainty for road and rail maintenance and upgrade programs can leverage Loddon Campaspe's road and rail freight networks to better support the needs of the region's businesses. It can help improve access, connectivity, and safety while also reducing supply chain costs, allowing businesses to remain competitive. Ongoing maintenance and upgrades not only improve efficiency, but also work to keep all road users safe.

Funding and planning for ongoing rail freight network development and maintenance will maximise efficient investment and support rail freight's competitiveness in the region. Ongoing freight rail development should consider the excluded elements of the revised Murray Basin Project. A long-term maintenance program would provide further confidence to investors and producers in Loddon Campaspe region.

Developing the outer metropolitan road corridor will improve access to proposed freight terminals and precincts, along with the future Bay West Port and connections to Melbourne Airport.

Upgrades to existing interstate and intrastate road corridors can effectively serve increasing travel demands between regional and metropolitan areas.

These recommendations will build on one-off Victorian Government funding commitments for improvements to the Loddon Valley Highway, the Murray Valley Highway, the Midland Highway, the Northern Highway and the Calder Freeway to help provide a high productivity freight network.

#### Recommendation 66

### Construct an outer metropolitan road and rail corridor

Within two years, determine staging for the outer metropolitan rail and road corridor. Subject to detailed business cases, commence construction of priority sections, starting with the E6 motorway by the end of this decade. Progressively stage corridor development for completion in the next 30 years. Provide a freight rail link to coincide with the opening of the Western Intermodal Freight Terminal.

#### Recommendation 76

### Expand and upgrade Melbourne's outer suburban road and bus networks

In the next 15 years, deliver a program of upgrades to Melbourne's arterial road, freeway and bus networks beyond what is currently funded, focusing on congested roads and corridors in outer metropolitan and growth suburbs council areas.

#### 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 economic productivity.

#### Recommendation 79

### Fund and plan for ongoing 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.

## Facilitate regional recycling industries in Loddon Campaspe

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. Dozens of resource recovery centres across Victoria collect materials from their local areas for transport and further recovery, of varying capacity and capability. A resource recovery centre network with more strategically located and better resourced facilities can reduce the costs of transporting materials, and bring them closer to end users.

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 – can 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* recommends upgrading or building new processing infrastructure for six priority materials – plastics, paper, cardboard, glass, organics, tyres and e-waste. This would create over 5000 new jobs and produce 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.

The extra recycling and resource recovery infrastructure required in the Loddon Campaspe region could include materials recovery facilities upgrades, paper separation plants, solar PV panel reprocessing, plastic processing plants, glass sand or aggregate plants and organic 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 planning.

#### 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 recycling and building a circular economy.



## Better connect the regions

### Improve transport options

Bendigo is a significant hub for employment opportunities and services at the heart of the Loddon Campaspe region. Services and associated infrastructure are concentrated in Bendigo, other regional hubs such as Echuca and, increasingly, in the southern parts of the region centres such as Castlemaine and Kyneton within Melbourne's peri-urban fringe. The concentration of services in regional hubs is a barrier to access for people living in more remote and less well-connected areas, particularly those without access to a car.

Loddon Campaspe residents are highly dependent on cars to get around. Access to public transport is substantially lower than the Victorian average, particularly outside of the Bendigo area. For example, just 14% of Macedon Ranges and 8% of Loddon residents live within ready access of public transport. Stakeholders have told us:

- Transport from towns such as Kyabram, Tongala, Rochester and Rushworth to regional centres is limited, and timetables do not support people needing to commute to work or education.
- Young people, elderly people, and those unable to drive or who cannot afford to, cannot access the education, health services and support agencies in centres such as Bendigo and Echuca.
- The existing public transport connections are infrequent, including, for example, between Echuca and Bendigo, and between Kyneton and Bendigo.
- Bus services are not frequent enough to meet every rail service.

Ensuring everyone can use transport relevant to their needs and circumstances can improve access to services and communities, especially for places in local neighbourhoods, commuting to work and travelling to and from school.

### Recommendations to enable viable transport options across Loddon Campaspe

Public transport reforms can focus on improving transport options within the Loddon Campaspe region. New solutions can integrate traditional public transport with more innovative, flexible transport options to deliver services which respond to community needs, such as community transport, on-demand services and the school bus network. Improved public transport connections into Bendigo from satellite towns, regional and rural areas would help Loddon Campaspe residents to access jobs and services more readily available in the regional hub. Equally, regional centres such as Maryborough, Kyneton and Echuca can benefit from regular and reliable public transport connections. Regional public transport reform can support Bendigo's existing *Integrated transport and land use strategy* goal of establishing a frequent, convenient, high quality bus network as the backbone of local public transport to support and facilitate more healthy and sustainable trips.

The Victorian Government is making significant rail investments as part of its *Regional network development plan* to improve service quality and capacity between Melbourne and Bendigo, which aims to deliver a minimum frequency of a train every 20 minutes at peak times and every 40 minutes in off peak periods. This will support Loddon Campaspe residents who commute to Melbourne for work – particularly those in Macedon Ranges, where half the workforce is employed outside the region. The Regional network development plan also aims to improve services between Melbourne and Echuca, with five train services every weekday.

Transforming cycling in Bendigo, and supporting active transport in the region, can improve access and safety, help reduce localised congestion, and improve health outcomes. This could include building on the recent success of the Ellis Street

protected cycling route between La Trobe University's Bendigo campus and the city centre, and implementing priority actions in the *Walk, cycle Greater Bendigo strategy* such as implementing safer cycling routes from Huntly, Eaglehawk, and Maiden Gully to central Bendigo.

#### Recommendation 39

### Transform cycling in Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong

In the next 10 years, prioritise and significantly progress developing a continuous network of high-quality, safer cycling corridors in Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong, including separated cycle ways and more storage at train stations and activity centres. In the next five years, immediate priorities include connections within and between central Melbourne and surrounding suburbs, and connections to the Monash, La Trobe and Sunshine National Employment and Innovation Clusters.

#### 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 delivery models that meet local needs.



### Improve digital connectivity and telecommunications infrastructure

Current levels of mobile and digital connectivity constrain businesses across the region from making full use of the benefits associated with new technologies. Bookings and payment systems, and marketing technologies rely on high speed reliable mobile phone and broadband connections. For example, Murray River tourism operators suggest that digital connectivity limitations constrain their businesses.

Better digital connectivity in Loddon Campaspe can enable the adoption of technologies such as remote sensing, leading to efficiencies in the region's livestock, broadacre grain and horticulture industries. It can enable faster uptake of smart manufacturing technologies. Bendigo's financial services businesses could connect faster and more reliably with customers and markets, both within and outside of the region. Bendigo's growing tertiary education sector could expand access through remote and e-learning.

The Victorian Government's On-Farm Internet of Things (IoT) trial in Serpentine supports sheep farms to be digitally enabled. Testing the benefits of electronic identification systems and complementary IoT applications can deliver efficiencies for sheep farming enterprises by moving to individual animal management. The Victorian Government's Digital Future Now initiative aims to address Loddon Campaspe's connectivity issues by funding faster broadband for regional towns and eradicating mobile black spots in populated areas of regional Victoria, in partnership with the Australian Government. However, business and community digital coverage and capacity can still be improved in Loddon Campaspe.

Loddon Campaspe residents have lower rates of internet connection, inferior internet speed and less reliable mobile coverage when compared with Melbourne. One in six Loddon Campaspe households do not have internet access, rising to one in four in Central Goldfields and Loddon, compared with one in eight in Melbourne. The *Loddon Campaspe Digital Plan* documents the region's mobile coverage problems, with 312 mobile black spots registered by mobile users – the second highest of Victoria's regions.

Regional stakeholders identified the barrier of poor digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some students having difficulties accessing education and many workers struggling to work remotely. Digital access and literacy barriers also affect many refugee and resettlement community members needing to access remote learning and community support.

### Recommendations to continue to bridge Loddon Campaspe's digital divide

Maintaining long term improvements to fixed broadband and mobile services can continue to address Loddon Campaspe's digital connectivity gaps. Better connectivity can help more Loddon Campaspe businesses take advantage of digital technology opportunities. Reliable and high-speed internet connections can help businesses to operate and compete from any region, placing them in a stronger position to withstand future crises and explore potential opportunities created by any longer-term shift to remote working. Combining this with improving the resilience of regional telecommunications infrastructure can help address Loddon Campaspe's digital infrastructure and connectivity needs.

Improving internet access for people without home connections can be achieved through leveraging the existing infrastructure, expertise and support available within Loddon Campaspe's library network.

This complements the Victorian Government's Bendigo VicFreeWiFi pilot. A comprehensive approach for more resilient communications across fixed, mobile and Wi-Fi networks can help ensure that Loddon Campaspe residents remain connected in times of emergency.

#### 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.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* (section 4.2) for additional recommendations on better connecting the regions.

## Foster regional Victorians' health, wellbeing, and inclusion

### Improve access to healthcare

Health indicators from across the region suggest a potential gap between relatively good health outcomes in Bendigo and the region's southern peri-urban fringe, and worse outcomes in Central Goldfields, Loddon, and Campaspe shires. Access to early intervention and health services may be an issue in the more remote parts of the region, and for more disadvantaged residents.

The region has relatively high numbers of mental health clients in all areas except the Macedon Ranges. Regional stakeholders are particularly concerned for the mental health of Loddon Campaspe's young people, and report their increased social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has also heightened the risk that young people will get left behind in education. The region has a high proportion of young people disengaged from school and not finishing Year 12 (over 30% in some areas, compared with a Victorian average of 17%). The changing nature of work also means that young people without training or qualifications find it particularly challenging to secure long-term employment.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide services to the region's Aboriginal people, and promote and protect their rights. Loddon Campaspe's Aboriginal population is growing rapidly, with projected growth of 50% between 2018 and 2028. The Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group told us the number of Aboriginal people living in poverty is highest of all Victoria's regions, and projected to grow. They told us more infrastructure is needed to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Addressing the Aboriginal service needs of the region needs to include consideration of policy approaches that support local solutions and integrate service provision within a self-determination framework.

### Recommendations to improve health outcomes for Loddon Campaspe residents

Our recommendations aim collectively to improve access to health services for Loddon Campaspe residents. They will build on recent government investments to expand the Maryborough Hospital and upgrade the Youth Prevention and Recovery Care (YPARC) unit in Bendigo.

Using innovation in healthcare delivery seeks to expand the use of technology in service provision, to better connect regional communities with specialist health services. Better access to mental health facilities in the region is also required.

A plan for future investment in Aboriginal community-controlled infrastructure aims to respond to the current and future infrastructure needs of the Loddon Campaspe's Aboriginal community, as well as contribute to Closing the Gap in outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

#### 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 funding over five years to promote and progressively implement better models of health care.

#### Recommendation 67

### Co-design an Aboriginal community-controlled infrastructure plan

Immediately 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.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* (section 3.3) for additional recommendations on aligning social infrastructure with better service delivery.



### Improve and better use community and council infrastructure

Demographic changes, such as an ageing population, are affecting the scope and mix of services councils need to provide. Loddon Campaspe faces various challenges in ensuring that residents have access to the services that they need, including:

- \ Smaller rural councils such as Loddon Shire, with a small (and declining) ratepayer base which is further constrained by below average incomes, face complexities in continuing to provide services over a relatively dispersed area.
- \ Areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage such as Maryborough have a higher per capita need for a range of health and community services.
- \ Growth areas of Bendigo and Macedon Ranges experience pressures on services and existing community facilities associated with high population growth and increased demand.
- \ Addressing the unique service and infrastructure needs of rapidly growing Aboriginal communities can help to Close the Gap in outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

The impact of climate change adds further complexity to the challenges facing local governments and communities. Higher temperatures, more days of extreme heat and heightened bushfire risk in some of the region's residential growth areas are placing new demands on community infrastructure. Loddon Campaspe stakeholders have pointed out that many community facilities are no longer fit for purpose. They require flexible infrastructure that can support multiple functions and changing community needs over time.

### Recommendations to make better use of community infrastructure

Better using community facilities can support regions and local governments in providing fit for purpose social infrastructure and respond to local needs. 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 with planning for service delivery can help ensure people can access essential services.

Greater Bendigo City Council and Mount Alexander Shire Council identify opportunities to develop multi-use, integrated facilities such as the Mount Alexander Health and Wellbeing precinct, a development which will co-locate health professionals, an aquatic facility and hospital services on one site. The Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference group expressed a current need for a multi-purpose shared use facility to include residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation, integrated with accommodation and treatment for individuals and their families and including vocational education, and life skills development.

Creating climate-adapted facilities for rural communities can support local governments to deliver a network of facilities. These can help reduce the health impacts of exposure to heat, and prolonged smoke from bushfires. Macedon Ranges, Central Goldfields and Mount Alexander Shire Councils all told us of their vulnerability to climate change.

#### 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.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* (section 2.4) for additional recommendations on adapting infrastructure for modern needs.



### Address social housing challenges

Greater Bendigo City Council identifies a growing affordable housing problem in the city, with an increasing number of households priced out of the housing market due to insufficient supply. Housing affordability is also an issue elsewhere in the region. Approximately one third (31%) of renting households in Loddon Campaspe experience rental stress, rising to 37% in Mount Alexander, the second highest rate of rental stress in Victoria. Just 17% of new lettings are affordable to lower income households in Mount Alexander, dropping to 4% in Macedon Ranges.

The region's Aboriginal communities also experience a chronic shortage of affordable rental housing.

The region has an estimated 2.6 homeless per 1000 people. Loddon Campaspe has seen a 13% rise in homelessness between 2011 and 2016, the third highest regional growth rate. Other factors contributing to demand for social housing across the region include family violence. Central Goldfields, for example, has the fifth highest per capita rate of family violence in Victoria. The City of Greater Bendigo's *Affordable Housing Action Plan* highlights that the supply of social housing is not keeping up with demand. It estimates unmet demand of approximately 2500 dwellings.

Youth Foyers respond to housing and integrated services gaps for young people who are at risk of homelessness. The model aims to help break cycles of disadvantage by providing stable accommodation for young people while supporting them to access education and training.

### Recommendations to enhance access to affordable, fit for purpose housing

Expanding social housing in regional centres, in locations with good access to transport and services, responds to the need for more social housing in the region, prioritising areas with strong forecast population growth such as Bendigo. The Victorian Government has committed to building social and affordable housing in regional Victoria with minimum guaranteed investments already committed for Bendigo and Macedon Ranges. Combined with the recommendation to renew public housing, this aims to improve Loddon Campaspe residents' access to affordable and fit for purpose housing.

Making social housing suitable for changing climates responds to the need for adequate heating and cooling in the region's social housing, building on recent Victorian Government funding commitments for energy efficiency upgrades in social housing properties. As well as installing split system air conditioning to better regulate temperatures in the home, solar panel are recommended to help low-income residents to manage energy-related cost of living pressures. Collectively, these recommendations aim to ensure a long-term focus on provisioning of social housing following the roll out of the Victorian Government's four-year Big Housing Build program.

Establishing a Youth Foyer in Bendigo aims to respond to the challenges facing the region's young people, acknowledging strong stakeholder support for the Youth Foyer model across the region. Youth Foyers provide integrated learning and accommodation services, to support vulnerable young people to successfully transition from school to work and help to break cycles of disadvantage.

#### 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.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy* (section 2.4 for additional recommendations on adapting infrastructure for modern needs.



One third of renting households in Loddon Campaspe experience **rental stress**

#### New lettings affordable to lower income households:

17% New lettings in Mount Alexander  
4% New lettings in Macedon Ranges



Loddon Campaspe's **homeless population** has risen 13% between 2011 and 2016



View from Lookout Tower in Rosalind Park



Macedon Station

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