

## 1. A bit about you....

The City of Greater Bendigo is one of Victoria's largest regional cities with a vibrant, growing, and diverse population living on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung country in the heart of Victoria.

The City was the first local government area in Australia to achieve accreditation as a 'Welcoming City'. Successful accreditation acknowledges significant work to make the City more welcoming and inclusive. The City is currently home to over 126,000 Victorians and is forecast to grow to over 155,000 by 2036. The City's Managed Growth Strategy, which is currently being prepared, is planning for a population of 200,000 by 2050.

The City is also proud to be a **UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy**, a host hub for the **2026 Commonwealth Games**, Australia's first internationally-accredited **Bicycle Friendly Community**, and regional service centre to a quarter of a million Victorians.

The City is currently developing a 30-year roadmap to ensure that our growth is well planned, climate resilient, and socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. The **Greater Bendigo Managed Growth Strategy** is informed by Victoria's 30-year infrastructure strategy and will direct Greater Bendigo's growth over the same timeframe.

The **Greater Bendigo Economic Development Strategy**, [A Stronger Greater Bendigo 2030](#), sets the strategic direction for an inclusive economy where 'all people can thrive', while the [City of Greater Bendigo investment prospectus](#) sets out transformation priority projects for collaborative government investment.

The **Greater Bendigo Climate Change and Environment Strategy** commits to achieving zero emission for the City by 2030. The City is working with government, business and community organisations through the **Greater Bendigo Climate Collaboration** to achieve this target.

The City is also focused on the health and wellbeing of residents with extensive planning and investment guided by the Public Health and Wellbeing Plan Healthy Greater Bendigo 2021-2025. Areas on focus include healthy liveable environments (e.g. **Greening Greater Bendigo 2020-2070**) and equitable access to quality food (e.g. **Greater Bendigo's Food System Strategy 2020-2030**).

## 2. What matters to you?

Almost every aspect of our residents' daily life is affected by quality of the City's planning, service delivery and policy implementation.

With this wide spread of responsibilities, there is much scope of change and disruption over a 30-year period. To assist consistent decision-making despite uncertainty, the City takes a principles-based approach, focusing on ensuring that future growth is:

*Sustainable* – infrastructure should deliver a social, economic, and environmental return on investment.

*Safe* – infrastructure should provide security, safety and consider future hazards, including under climate change scenarios.

*Suitable* – infrastructure should be fit for purpose, informed by a deep understanding of current and likely future community needs.

In previous submissions, the City has recommended the inclusion of built infrastructure that aligns with these principles, including expansion of water, sewer and stormwater to support new development and development at higher densities; a large scale greenfield employment precinct; revitalising the Bendigo Station Precinct to unlock underutilised land; and better community facilities to connect residents.

The City has also focused on digital infrastructure and connectivity to support a higher skilled workforce, improve educational attainment and enhance employment opportunities, an opportunity now accelerated by changes in work styles driven by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In our [City of Greater Bendigo Investment Prospectus](#), we have scoped a range of projects for immediate investment, including opportunities such as:

- revitalising existing sports infrastructure and adding additional sporting infrastructure capacity as part of the 2026 Commonwealth Games;
- the Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct, which will deliver a new centre of commercial and industrial activity including development of the Marong Western Freight Corridor;
- strengthening road connections to improve safety and functionality, including a new intersection at Carolyn Way, Maiden Gully and the Howard Street-Midland Highway intersection; and
- pursuing our community hubs model through the redevelopment of the Peter Krenz Centre, expanding the current aquatic centre for a broader range of community uses.

In terms of build infrastructure, the City has recently been pleased to see the progression of major infrastructure projects including:

- the recently completed \$152 million Bendigo Law Courts;
- the \$100 million Bendigo GovHub;
- the \$9.985 million Bendigo Airport redevelopment, delivering a new airport terminal building;
- a State Government commitment of \$21 million towards the expansion of Bendigo Art Gallery; and
- the purchase of land for the Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct, with funding commitments for \$6 million for infrastructure.

### **3. Your proposed ideas: What strategic idea/s are you proposing for the 30-year infrastructure strategy that will achieve your desired outcomes?**

#### ***Doing more with less: Contaminated land***

Doing more with less means leveraging better outcomes for more people from every investment.

Like many cities, Greater Bendigo faces the challenge of housing a growing population. However, the City faces a more exceptional challenge in managing a considerable burden of contaminated land and groundwater. Some of this contamination is the legacy of gold mining. Bendigo was one of the country's largest gold mining settlements, leaving land significantly contaminated as a by-product of early gold mining and processing. Other areas of contamination are due to naturally occurring metals that have been exposed and mobilised during mining activity.

Because many of these contaminated sites originate from the European settlement of Bendigo, they are frequently located in what are now central, urbanised, and well serviced locations. Facilitating remediation and development of priority identified sites, would allow

the existing urban infrastructure to do more for more people. While the gold mining legacy creates barriers to development for cities like Bendigo and Ballarat, across Victoria post-industrial contamination of ground and water prevents infill development and decreases the utility of existing infrastructure.

Management of these sites is complex and bespoke, with each site presenting its own challenges and limitations. In terms of residential sites, the City aims to deliver both safety and equity in ensuring that all homes provide safe spaces to live, play, and garden. Further, some sites already impact the broader environment. Remediation or management of these sites is important to facilitate the City's continued growth but beyond the capacity of local government alone.

Therefore, the City proposes that Infrastructure Victoria make a priority recommendation for the remediation or ongoing management of contaminated sites that are otherwise highly suitable for infill development, creating a pipeline of land for infill development and unlocking land for public open space and recreation. A potential option to assist with funding land remediation as a result of historical mining, would be the return of Gold Royalty funds (or a portion of) to the region – which are collected from the Bendigo's two operating gold mines.

### ***Doing more with less: Community infrastructure***

There are hundreds of community buildings in existence across the City – including community centres, halls, libraries and sporting pavilions. The City is actively managing a range of challenges, including:

- inequity in service levels, sometimes accentuated by growth or decline in catchment populations;
- some facilities no longer being fit-for-purpose, due to changes in standards, community needs or community expectations;
- changing patterns of community volunteering affecting building management models and use;
- strategic land use planning and environmental sustainability considerations; and
- financial challenges in maintaining a very large number of assets.

Without change, the current model for asset maintenance and renewal is unsustainable and the gap between what is needed and what can be funded will continue to grow.

To manage this, the City is exploring rationalisation towards a model of fewer but more flexible community hubs. Community hubs help provide cost-effective solutions to infrastructure and service provision. They are important for healthy, sustainable communities, facilitating civic, social, and economic participation opportunities and supports, and access to gardens and food growing.

Community hubs support participation in community life and access to services. They are characterised by:

- being multi-purpose;
- supporting diverse community needs and interests;
- being open to and inclusive of all community members; and
- supporting 'joined up' service access and delivery for community members.

The City recommends that any government investment in community facilities should be guided by the above characteristics.

### ***Navigating change and disruption***

Navigating disruption means making the essentials of life as robust and resilient as possible.

Electricity demand in the City will increase as we electrify homes and businesses. The City has capacity to generate more electricity than it uses; however, realising this potential relies on the distribution and transmission networks being able to transmit the electricity from where it is produced to where it is used.

The current transmission and distribution network will require upgrading to cater for the City's generation capacity and growing electricity needs, including upgrading electricity supplies from the street to buildings where needed to enable homes and businesses to 'get off gas' and electrify their operations.

Ensuring sustainable and reliable energy is fundamental to economic growth and attracting regional investment, including workers reliant on secure energy to work from home. Reliable energy is also an increasing safety issue, with heatwaves Australia's highest mortality natural disaster. Combined with an ageing population and projected increases in extreme heat, reliable peak energy will be vital to ensuring the summer liveability of the Greater Bendigo region.

Therefore, the City recommends that Infrastructure Victoria include regional transmission and local distribution in its planning to deliver economic benefits and safety improvements across regional Victoria. While projects such as the VNI West interconnector will help transmit electricity from Victoria to New South Wales, this project will not necessarily unlock the renewable energy potential that exists elsewhere or ensure there is sufficient electricity capacity to cater for future needs.

Moreover, the State Government should support greater transparency from Distributed Network Service Providers (DNSPs) in terms of network capacity and constraints to enable better partnerships between DNSPs, local governments and community organisations that help overcome constraints where they occur.

### ***Improving social equity through access***

One of the most powerful forms of social equity is ensuring that everyone has a safe and secure home.

The City welcomes the Big Housing Build's investment in Bendigo, delivering a minimum of \$85 million towards social, affordable and private homes in the City, including the \$47 million [Virginia Hill development](#). However, the expected delivery of around 120 homes falls well short of current demand, with more than 3,000 people currently on the social housing waiting list for the region. The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation's recent *State of the Nation's Housing 2022-23* report suggests that the housing market is likely to continue to underdeliver against demand, deepening the existing housing shortages. The 2021 Census shows that the number of people experiencing homelessness in Greater Bendigo has almost doubled in the intercensal period.

The City's [Affordable Housing Action Plan](#) sets out a range of actions designed to increase the supply of social and affordable housing into the Greater Bendigo market. However, the City is limited in its capacity to influence the market or materially support the construction of housing. The City is also acutely aware of the need to balance the supply of land and housing against the need to ensure that new housing is sustainably built and is directed away from areas of high natural hazard risk, both now and under a projected future climate.

Housing also needs to provide a safe, liveable environment. The City is striving to increase the density of the urban fabric to deliver more homes with better access to employment and services. However, with denser housing comes a concentration of infrastructure needs and urban environmental impacts. Denser housing, unless well planned, can reduce the ability of residents to garden, grow food and dry clothes outdoors. Similarly, denser urban environments need carefully planned road reserves and public spaces to ensure adequate tree cover and urban heat management.

Environmental impacts include the management of noise, odour, air, and water pollution. Local government must be supported to manage or prevent impacts through modern and efficient state policy, for example in directing the placement of domestic equipment or requiring energy efficient building standards. Equally, to ensure excellence in dwelling design quality, broader Victorian guidance on best-practice design is useful and relevant, particularly in enabling families to consider living in denser housing.

Particularly of concern for the City is the management of ageing sewer infrastructure in established areas and the development of unsewered growth areas. For example, Goornong in the municipality's north-east grew by around 10 per cent between 2016 and 2021. With the reopening of the train station in late 2021, under the Regional Rail Revival program, the area is attractive to residents as an affordable and commutable location. However, it remains unsewered, limiting its growth potential.

The City recommends that Infrastructure Victoria place acute and long-term housing needs at the centre of its infrastructure strategy, consistent with the Commonwealth Government's direction under the [2022 National Housing Accord](#).

The infrastructure strategy should specifically articulate the role of local government in participating in the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and in informing the work of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council as it investigates barriers to market provision of affordable housing.

The strategy should further emphasize the need for supporting housing infrastructure and policy, such as sewerage, drainage, and noise management to accompany and facilitate development.

### ***Mitigating and adapting to our changing climate: Circular Greater Bendigo***

Circular Greater Bendigo is a flagship project of the [Greater Bendigo Climate Change and Environment Strategy 2021-2026](#) and the Premier's Sustainability Awards 2022 winner for circular economy innovation.

The City's Eaglehawk landfill will close in 2023 and the City is developing suitable circular economy infrastructure and multiple 'Circular Greater Bendigo' hubs to replace it.

This work will future-proof the provision of high-quality resource recovery and circular economy services to regional residents and businesses and support the region's transition to a post-landfill environment. The project includes:

- transitioning the Eaglehawk landfill to a residential-focused hub;
- developing a dedicated commercial and industrial Circular Economy Precinct to support central Victoria's shift to a circular economy; and
- upgrading the City's additional regional transfer stations and re-sale shops to support the region's two circular economy precincts.



The City proposes that Infrastructure Victoria prioritise investment in regional circular economy hubs that can function as at-scale proof-of-concept flagships, while benefiting from trialling new approaches to waste management in regional communities with lower populations and reduced land-use pressures.

***Mitigating and adapting to our changing climate: Sustainable transport***

To support Greater Bendigo's population growth, the City is seeking to create a more connected, safe and sustainable transport network. The City's target is to deliver a future where a third of trips occur by active travel, a third by public transport and a third by electric vehicle.

Electric vehicles, while important, will not decarbonise our transport system in the short-to-medium term, given that many of the fossil fuel cars on the road today will still be in operation in 2030. Current public transport options in the City (bus and train) are not conducive for day-to-day travel for most of the community. A significant shift in investment will be required to achieve our transport goals.

While there is investment in large public transport projects in Melbourne, there is little investment in regional Victoria. Responding to both climate adaptation and '*Doing more with less*', the City recommends a comprehensive review of bus route and timetables in Bendigo to maximise the utility and connectivity of existing services against modern usage patterns. This will be particularly valuable as the changes in train patronage following the recent fare capping are better understood.

While there is federal and state funding for roads, walking and cycling infrastructure is comparatively under-funded. The City aims to deliver an accessible and protected walking and cycling network, with a particular focus on managing urban traffic congestion by increasing active transport in and around the city centre. The City's proposed protected walking and cycling network once finished will result in 90 per cent of Bendigo homes being located within 500 metres of the fully connected network, enabling easy and prioritised active transport options to key connections such as schools, commercial centres, and community facilities.

The 'Low Line' shared trail is the City's key proposed active transport corridor that takes advantage of Bendigo Creek as the natural spine of the city's historic development and will connect people into and through the city centre. The Low Line will emulate New York's High Line by providing a safe and separated trail that activates a central public space corridor, enables the Dja Dja Wurrung people to express a cultural narrative for the trail and includes public art that celebrates all of Bendigo's cultures. There are a further nine track and trail links that have been identified and costed in the [City of Greater Bendigo investment prospectus](#).

Lastly, there is potential benefit in preventing unnecessary trips. Currently, locally grown food is often transported to Melbourne for wholesale before being trucked back to Greater Bendigo for retail sale. The more that local workers and produce can be retained for local use, the greater the reduction in preventable emissions.

The City proposes that Infrastructure Victoria include regional cities in its planning for enabling active transport in and around city centres.

***Mitigating and adapting to our changing climate: Climate resilience***

As the frequency of extreme weather events continues to increase under a changing climate, so too does the risk of damage to essential infrastructure. We need to 'build back better' to ensure that each incidence of damage to infrastructure also represents an opportunity to strengthen infrastructure against future threats.

Local governments struggle to fund our existing renewal and maintenance needs without considering the need to build to a more climate resilient standard, or future impacts on insurance affordability and availability.

Consistent with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework and association National Partnership Agreement, Infrastructure Victoria should continue to emphasise the importance of ongoing state-level programs to strengthening essential infrastructure and the important role of local government in identifying priority sites and supporting implementation.

### **Why do you think your proposed ideas are better than the other options you might have considered?**

This submission draws on an extensive body of strategic planning, policy and community engagement that informs the key documents provided below.

Each document is the product of extensive internal research, independent reviews, and widespread community and stakeholder consultation that has considered other options and determined that these recommendations are useful, achievable, and deliver more certain benefits than other options considered.

Key documents:

- [City of Greater Bendigo investment prospectus](#)
- [Affordable Housing Action Plan](#)
- [Greater Bendigo Climate Change and Environment Strategy 2021-2026](#)
- [A Stronger Greater Bendigo 2030](#)
- [Council Plan \(Mir wimbul\) 2021-2025](#)

### **How are the documents or information you have shared relevant to your idea?**

These documents provide the overarching strategic context, background analysis and engagement process that support the ideas presented in this submission.