

28 April 2025

Dr Jonathan Spear
Chief Executive Officer
Infrastructure Victoria
Level 16, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Dr Spear,

Submission to Victoria's Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy – Recommendation 4

Federation University Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on *Victoria's Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy*, particularly in relation to **Recommendation 4: Expand TAFE in Melbourne's growth areas and some large regional centres**.

We strongly support the emphasis on building skills infrastructure to meet Victoria's workforce needs. However, we propose that Recommendation 4 be broadened to explicitly recognise the distinct and vital role of regional university campuses in delivering accessible, place-based education infrastructure alongside regional TAFEs.

Regional university campuses act as critical economic and social anchors for their communities. With local regional TAFEs, they are often the only providers of higher education opportunities within their regions, meaning they:

- **Enable greater education choice** for students who require a university qualification and would otherwise need to relocate to metropolitan areas, increasing participation rates and education equity access, particularly among underrepresented groups.
- **Support regional workforce development** by aligning education delivery with local industry needs in sectors such as health, renewable energy, agriculture, construction, and advanced manufacturing. These workforces are critical to the development of many of the infrastructure initiatives identified in the Infrastructure Victoria draft plan as well as Victoria's overall economic prosperity.
- **Strengthen community resilience** by offering locally accessible pathways to high-value employment and driving local innovation.

Investing in regional campuses ensures Victoria can meet its future skills needs not just in growth corridors around Melbourne, but across the entire state, in ways that are both cost-effective and equitable. For instance, well-supported campuses in areas such as the Central Highlands and Gippsland, and Wimmera Southern Mallee can deliver faster and more efficient local education-to-employment pipelines for critical sectors such as renewable energy, new technology and infrastructure development. This is in comparison to forcing students and employers to access education opportunities or workers from metropolitan Melbourne.

While metropolitan university campuses perform a similar role for Melbourne, their context is significantly different. The greater availability of public transport and road infrastructure, the

proximity of multiple providers to large domestic student populations, and businesses' easier access to a broader metropolitan workforce mean that infrastructure planning for metropolitan campuses does not require the same considerations. In many cases, expansion of metropolitan campuses can be accommodated within the existing infrastructure fabric of the city without the need for the more deliberate place-based planning required in regional areas.

In addition to this, recognising the need to regional university campuses as part of Victoria's infrastructure strategy has a compounding benefit for regional productivity and growth

Federation operates the largest regional technology park capability in Australia, with facilities across Gippsland, the Wimmera Southern-Mallee and Gippsland regions:

- Federation's Morwell Innovation Centre contributes more than 200 jobs in Gippsland's energy and food and fibre sectors.
- The emerging Ararat Jobs and Technology Precinct is supporting research and enterprises focused on agribusiness and advanced manufacturing.
- Federation's Ballarat Technology Park established in partnership with the Victorian Government, now supports almost 10 per cent of Ballarat's gross regional product and over 9 per cent of full-time equivalent employment. This park hosts 64 enterprises employing over 2,400 full-time staff and generating \$700 million in annual economic output. The park has also recently expanded to include major industry partners such as EY and Accenture, supporting a diversified technology, research and training ecosystem.

This infrastructure is integrated with Federation's learning programs via its adoption of a Co-Operative Education Model, which ensures every Federation program will include an industry or workplace experience. The parks facilitate and leverage this model through directly linked to student placements, workforce development programs, long-term research partnerships, and pathways for student-led start-ups.

These investments are strengthened by complementary initiatives such as the Victorian Universities VERNet project, which extends high-quality fibre and defence-grade network services into regional areas, offering stronger infrastructure that enables these technology parks and innovation hubs in regional areas to thrive.

This is why Federation is focused on using its regional campus footprint to establish more regional innovation hubs and technology parks, and meet Victoria's emerging infrastructure, workforce, and productivity needs.

Strengthening Recommendation 4 to recognise the infrastructure role of regional universities would ensure these proven, place-based models of economic and workforce development are embedded in Victoria's long-term planning.

My proposed approach to Recommendation 4 reflects broader trends in infrastructure planning that recognise the need for distributed, place-based investment models, that is vital to regional economic growth, where all infrastructure is closely tied to the distinct social and economic profiles of local communities.

Strengthening Recommendation 4 to reflect the importance of regional campuses in line with regional TAFEs would ensure the Strategy fully captures the infrastructure needs of a growing and changing Victoria that recognises the distinct circumstances of regional communities — and supports a more cohesive, inclusive economy in the decades ahead.



Federation University Australia would welcome the opportunity to brief Infrastructure Victoria further on how regional education infrastructure can help deliver these long-term objectives.

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I trust this information has been of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]

Professor Duncan Bentley
Vice-Chancellor and President
Federation University Australia

