

Merri-bek Civic Centre

90 Bell Street
Coburg Victoria 3058
T: (03) 9240 1111

Postal Address

Locked Bag 10
Brunswick Victoria 3056

merri-bek.vic.gov.au



Mr Jonathan Spear
Chief Executive Officer
Infrastructure Victoria
Level 33, 140 William Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

28 April 2025

Dear Mr Spear,

Re: Submission to Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy

Merri-bek City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy.

Merri-bek, located between 4 and 14 kilometres north of the Melbourne central business district and bordered by the Moonee Ponds Creek to the west, Merri Creek to the east, Park Street to the south and the Western Ring Road to the north, is home to 191,747 people.

Priding ourselves on being 'one community, proudly diverse', Merri-bek has a rich indigenous, multicultural, manufacturing, working-class, creative and activist history that has helped shape the identity of modern-day Melbourne.

Like other local government areas, our growing population presents many challenges. In the last 20 years, Merri-bek's population has grown by more than a third (36%). It is now estimated at 191,747 people. And by 2036, it is forecast to rise by 28% to 222,733 people.

Our municipality will continue to experience increasing demand for more infrastructure, services and resources to support evolving community needs around, transport, employment, learning, creative industries, open space and environment and health and wellbeing.

Council is planning for the services and infrastructure needed by more residents but needs to seek more Federal and State contributions towards delivering local community infrastructure to help us meet our challenges, implement our strategies and meet the needs of our community.

I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight our highest infrastructure priorities in addition to our feedback to the draft recommendations in the 30-year infrastructure strategy, attached.

Of highest priority for Merri-bek, and our northern neighbours in the Northern Councils Alliance, is:

- The **Upfield Rail Line duplication and upgrade** between Gowrie and Upfield Stations to improve train frequency, accessibility, passenger experience and station amenity.
- **Re-configuration of the City Loop to separate the Upfield and Craigieburn lines**, removing ongoing constraints and improving capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers along both lines.
- **Extension and electrification of the Upfield line to Wallan** with new stations, including at Beveridge and Cloverton, to support the rapidly occurring residential, commercial and industrial development in the region.

We strongly recommend that these actions are promoted from 'future option' to a recommendation in the 30-year infrastructure strategy.

Melbourne's north is a region that is growing fast and will ultimately be home to more than 1.5 million people. The Northern Growth Corridor is projected to accommodate 30 per cent of Melbourne's future growth over the coming decades.

Despite the importance of the Upfield rail line to the growth of Melbourne, it has one of the least frequent peak period services in Melbourne's rail network and Upfield Rail Line stations north of Coburg - Fawkner, Merlynston, Gowrie and Batman - are among the lowest rated for commuter experience.

Further north, passengers travelling on crowded V/Line services from Mitchell and Hume to Melbourne, via the Craigieburn line, are often standing for over 80 minutes. These services were expected to reach capacity by 2030 but with high growth happening, they're likely to be full by 2026.

Duplicating the Upfield line between Gowrie and Upfield stations will enable trains to run more often and more reliably and station upgrades will improve the experience for commuters. Extending the Upfield line to connect with the Craigieburn line will allow Wallan V/Line services to travel via the Upfield line providing more services in the north, now and in the future. Electrifying the line from Craigieburn to Wallan will more than double the capacity of train services and reduce travel times.

These key rail investments are needed now to resolve critical constraints on train services in Merri-bek, Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell to unlock the potential of Melbourne's north.

Merri-bek strongly supports **investment in better bus networks** that connect communities to major precincts and health and education facilities. Melbourne's northern region is underserved by public transport and consequently suffers from higher levels of traffic congestion. In many areas in the north, public transport is unreliable or unavailable and there is poor connection in growth areas.

We also strongly support the **urgent planning, funding and delivery of accessible tram stop upgrades and public transport accessibility improvements to rapidly progress towards the legislated 2022 accessibility targets**.

Improving accessibility not only delivers critical improvements for a person with a mobility restriction, but would also deliver improvements for others, including those with health issues that make steps difficult, as well as parents with prams or passengers with personal shopping trolleys.

We were pleased to see the recommendation to reform infrastructure contributions, and we support **a review of the Development Contributions Plan (DCP) program to create a framework based on simplicity, flexibility, certainty and fairness** to assist local government with the costs of efficient and timely delivery of required infrastructure for growing local populations. We also believe Legislative reform is required to ensure Build to Rent developments make a fair contribution to public open space.

A robust local development contribution system is key to the efficient and timely delivery of required infrastructure to our growing local population.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy Henderson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cathy Henderson
Chief Executive Officer

Submission form: Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy

Your details

Name:	Cathy Henderson
Organisation (if applicable):	Merri-bek City Council
Position (if applicable):	Chief Executive Officer
Email:	[REDACTED]
Phone:	[REDACTED]

About you

Please tell us which best describes you:

☐ Victorian resident
☐ Victorian business owner/operator
☐ Industry professional
☐ Community organisation representative
☒ Local government representative
☐ State government representative
☐ Researcher
☐ Other (please specify): Click or tap here to enter text.

Your focus areas

Select the topics or regions you are providing feedback on (select all that apply):

Topics	Regions
☐ Across sectors	☐ Regional Victoria
☒ Circular economy	☐ Urban growth areas
☒ Cities	☒ Melbourne
☒ Climate change	
☒ Community infrastructure	
☒ Education	
☒ Energy	
☐ Freight	
☐ Health	
☒ Housing	
☒ Infrastructure for Victoria's First Peoples	
☒ Transport	
☒ Water	

Your feedback

Topic/area:	Housing
Recommendation name:	Build more social housing
Recommendation number:	1
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Public and community housing offer life-enhancing and life-changing outcomes for some people in our communities but the shortfall in need and provision is huge. Victoria offers a lower percentage of social housing of any Australia state and territory. While many new affordable homes are needed, there is also an urgent need to make healthy and safe existing, ageing, public housing stock. Despite completions of some new public and community housing and commitments from the Victorian Government for more, the pace is too slow and quantum of change is too low with the most recent figures provided by Homes Victoria showing a small drop in actual numbers of social housing in Merri-bek year on year.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	There are over 100,000 Victorians awaiting social housing on the Victorian Housing Register. Social Housing makes up only 2.9% of Victorian homes, the lowest percentage in Australia. The Victorian Council of Social Services estimates that 6,000 social homes are needed to be added each year just to maintain the proportion of social housing. In Merri-bek, 4,341 households (6.4% of Merri-bek's population) are in need of affordable housing, meaning they are unable to access market priced rental housing. The majority of need (65%) is for very low-income households. For these households, social housing is the only viable option being affordably housed. Merri-bek is in two preference regions of the Victorian Housing Register. As of June 2024, 5,924 households were on the Broadmeadows area waiting list and 129 households were waiting in the Inner Metro North Area.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Investment should also be prioritised to retrofit and upgrade ageing public housing. In 2017, the Victorian Auditor General report noted that 60% of the public housing stock in Victoria was over 35 years old. A desktop assessment of identified social housing in Merri-bek would indicate that most of the social housing stock (90% of which is owned by Homes Victoria) is ageing, with many single homes, walk-up flats and the high-rise block in Brunswick being at least 50 years old. Retrofitting and upgrading public housing as well as building new public housing on public land also present an opportunity for Homes Victoria to meet the State Government's obligations of the <i>Climate Change Act 2017</i> whilst reducing the public housing waiting list.

Topic/area:	Education
Recommendation name:	Facilitate markets and invest in kindergarten infrastructure
Recommendation number:	2
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Evidence-informed planning regarding the future projected demand is essential to ensure the timely delivery of additional kindergarten places into the future. Achieving this requires detailed analysis of existing infrastructure and the capacity to expand facilities to accommodate growth in demand for additional kindergarten places. Collaborative planning between the State and local governments is essential to ensure effective planning and delivery of new infrastructure where required along with expansion or upgrading of existing facilities.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Over recent years Merri-bek Council has planned, co-invested and delivered new and expanded kindergarten infrastructure in collaboration with the Victorian School Building Authority, Department of Education. This approach has enabled the timely planning and cost-effective delivery of infrastructure to meet community need. Ongoing State Government investment in both the planning and delivery of kindergarten infrastructure is essential to ensure the timely provision of new places to meet projected future growth.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	

Topic/area:	Community Infrastructure
Recommendation name:	Build libraries and aquatic centres for Melbourne's growing communities
Recommendation number:	5
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	It is widely recognised that public libraries improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and the community. Library services have a positive impact by providing access to physical collections, meeting

	spaces, technology and the internet, or more recent programs targeted at holistic social, physical, and mental health and wellbeing. Research commissioned by the State Library of Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria in 2023 found the positive impacts of public libraries on communities outweigh the costs by double and that Victorian public libraries generate a net annual benefit of \$234.7 million in health and wellbeing benefits. Similarly, aquatic and leisure facilities are an important contributor to the health and wellbeing of community, supporting improvements in physical and mental health, and providing an environment to build social networks and connections. Councils face increasing demand for community infrastructure as populations grow and change. This is true for growth area councils, but also for established councils, particularly with the Victorian government plans to increase housing density in Melbourne.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Some Merri-bek libraries are more than 40 years old, with Coburg Library housed in a building that was built as a supermarket 60 years ago. The facilities in such buildings do not meet community expectations or industry standards. For example, to meet the industry standard for the required library floorspace for the projected population of 222,733 people in 2036, Merri-bek requires an additional 1,145 sqm of library space. In 2020, only 14% of Merri-bek's library assets were fit for purpose. While this figure would be improved with the completion of the \$27.5 million Glenroy Community Hub in 2022, which includes a 1,926sqm library, Merri-bek will need to continue to invest in its ageing library infrastructure to meet community needs. While the Merri-bek community has excellent access to public aquatic and leisure facilities, with six Council-owned facilities located across the municipality, the current provision of public swimming pools is based on facility and service provision approaches which were common throughout the 1950s-60s and 70's for individual Councils. This historic approach focused on 50m outdoor and/or 25m indoor swimming pools catering mostly for recreational and lap swimming. Merri-bek's aquatic facilities were predominantly built in the post war period, with the exception of Brunswick Baths, which was built in 1914. Merri-bek's outdoor pools in particular are reaching the end of their serviceable lifespan adding additional operating costs to maintain - Coburg Olympic opened in 1965 and Pascoe Vale Outdoor Pool opened in 1941 – and do not provide contemporary infrastructure. Others such as Brunswick Baths and Coburg Leisure, which are open year-round, are at capacity. Aquatic recreational activities have evolved over time, and there is community expectation for aquatic and recreation facilities for all ages and different purposes (dedicated children's pools, facilities supporting older people to be physically active, warm water program pools for rehabilitation). In recent years, Merri-bek has committed significant investment to redevelop a number of its ageing aquatic facilities, including \$27.3 million for Oak Park Leisure Sports and Aquatic Centre and \$36.8 million for stage 1 of Fawkner Leisure Centre. Merri-bek Council will need to continue to invest in ageing library and aquatic and leisure infrastructure to provide contemporary and

	relevant infrastructure and meet the demands of increased population, and will need to partner with other levels of government to achieve this.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Expand the recommendation to include supporting Councils in established areas to maintain and upgrade libraries and aquatic centres to ensure these essential community facilities meet the community's needs into the future.

Topic/area:	Community Infrastructure/Transport
Recommendation name:	Make government infrastructure more accessible
Recommendation number:	6
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	One in six, or 18%, of people live with disability in Australia. Information about the level of accessibility of buildings is critical for people with disabilities when deciding whether to visit those premises in the first place. Without adequate accessibility information, people with disabilities cannot appropriately plan their journey in advance. This can often lead to anxiety-producing situations such as getting lost, not being able to enter a part of building, or encountering an embarrassing personal situation. To avoid these situations, many people with disabilities will simply choose not to visit these sites if accessibility information is not obvious. Merri-bek Council's community consultation has repeatedly told us that poor information about accessibility leads to a direct reduction in reduced community participation for people with disabilities. People with disabilities deserve to have equal access to the same things in life as everyone else and accessibility information in buildings is an important feature to ensure equality is achieved. It's also important to note that not everyone with a disability experiences the same barriers. While accessibility information for people with physical disabilities is vital, it is equally important to accommodate for people with other disabilities, including hidden or invisible disabilities. People with neurodivergent conditions, for example, represent the largest disability group in Australia, and can process and react to information in different ways, therefore its essential that we provide information in different formats, so that as many people as possible are included. In other words, adopting a universal design approach in the way we deliver this information will ensure as many people as possible will benefit from the accessibility information. Merri-bek has long advocated for accessibility improvements to public transport, particularly the tram network. The current lack of accessibility on the tram network significantly constrains the

	movement of people with mobility issues. A person with a mobility restriction cannot have an accessible tram journey without both a level-access stop and a low-floor tram. In 2018-2019, the Victorian Auditor General's Office audited accessible tram services in Victoria and found that: • 73% of tram stops did not provide level access • 62% of trams did not provide a low floor for level access In Merri-bek, the proportion of tram stops that did not provide level access was even higher, with 89% of stops not providing level access. Improving accessibility would also deliver improvements not just for those with mobility issues but for others, including those with health issues that make steps difficult, as well as parents with prams or passengers with personal shopping trolleys.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	With a higher number of residents in Merri-bek requiring assistance with core daily activities in comparison to Greater Melbourne (6.2% compared with 4.9% respectively), Merri-bek Council has long advocated for investment to ensure all public transport is accessible for people of all abilities. A Victorian Auditor General Report (VAGO) 2018-19 Report into tram stop accessibility found many of Merri-bek's tram services do not meet the accessibility needs of passengers with mobility restrictions, and in the absence of a clear pipeline of investment, will fail to do so in coming years.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Click or tap here to enter text.

Topic/area:	Cities
Recommendation name:	Rezone locations near existing infrastructure for more home choices
Recommendation number:	7
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ In part
2. Tell us why	Merri-bek recognises the urgent need to increase housing supply across Victoria and supports delivering more homes close to existing infrastructure, including public transport. This broadly aligns with the State Government's current focus on directing housing growth to activity centres located around train stations such as Brunswick and Coburg Stations along the upfield line in Merri-bek. However, the current approach to rezoning land in these locations appears to prioritise existing public transport access as the primary driver, with limited consideration of other essential services that support a liveable, well-functioning community. These include

	access to schools, healthcare, active transport upgrades, open space, local services, and employment opportunities. Brunswick provides a clear example of the challenges associated with growth that is not matched by timely infrastructure investment. The suburb has seen substantial housing development in recent years, yet investment in public transport and other essential services has not kept pace. The Upfield Line is already under significant pressure, and local roads are congested, with many streets at capacity. The current approach by the State Government risks exacerbating the issue by focusing solely on housing delivery. Planning for long-term, sustainable housing growth—particularly when enabled through rezoning—requires a more comprehensive, place-based approach. This must ensure residents can meet most of their daily needs locally and reduce reliance on car travel by supporting walkable access to jobs and essential services. Delivering this vision will require coordinated planning and targeted State investment, including urgently needed upgrades to the Upfield Line’s capacity and reliability. A clear strategy to retain or support employment land in areas identified for higher-density housing is needed, to avoid the risk of displacing local jobs and undermining the economic diversity and sustainability of these centres. The draft <i>30-Year Infrastructure Strategy</i> recommends that councils be consulted on rezoning and infrastructure changes. Merri-bek strongly supports this and believes engagement must be early, transparent, and sustained throughout the planning process. Councils bring critical local knowledge and play a key role in guiding growth that is both strategic and context specific. Finally, while the Strategy references potential land value uplift from rezoning, it does not clearly outline the financial implications for landowners—particularly the potential application of the Windfall Gains Tax under reforms such as the Housing Choice and Transport Zone. Many landowners may be unaware of this potential liability, and proactive, accessible communication is essential. Merri-bek remains committed to working in partnership with the State to deliver more housing. However, this must be part of a coordinated and balanced approach that maintains liveability, supports economic opportunity, and ensures infrastructure keeps pace with growth.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	An example of an index which considers a wider range of factors that impact liveability is the Australian Urban Observatory. The AUO Liveability Index measures the liveability of a location based on a range of factors including Community Centres, Culture and Leisure, Early Years, Education, Health and Social Services, Sport and Recreation, Food, Convenience, Walkability, Public Transport, Public Open Space, Housing Affordability, and Local Employment. It is a robust, well researched, peer reviewed, credible methodology. It also enables comparison of liveability levels of one suburb relative to other suburbs within the same city, or across the country.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Additional funding/grants programs should be investigated by the State Government to help Councils undertake the strategic

	work required to plan for new housing locations that provide the right mix of housing, jobs, services and other infrastructure. A review of Windfall Gains Tax and its applicability to areas rezoned for more housing should also be undertaken.
Topic/area:	Housing
Recommendation name:	Mandate more affordable homes near existing infrastructure
Recommendation number:	Future Option
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Council estimates in the order of 7,000 to 10,000 more social and affordable housing dwellings are needed in Merri-bek over the next decade. Council is proactive in this area including establishing Merri-bek Affordable Housing and gifting land to this organisation to directly contribute to the supply of quality social and affordable housing. However, most of this housing must be delivered by the private market. Council currently negotiates with developers and landowners to secure voluntary affordable housing through the planning scheme amendment and planning permit process. Council is proud of what it has been able to achieve in a system that relies on negotiating voluntary social and affordable housing contributions in private developments. For example, to March of the 2023-24 financial year, four planning permits were issued that included a requirement to provide a total of 369 social or affordable housing dwellings. However, voluntary agreements are not providing enough homes at an affordable price point for lower income households. Mandatory affordable housing requirements in the planning system are needed to deliver the level of social and affordable housing required. Council acknowledges the State Government has introduced a fast-track Ministerial approval process for developments with social and affordable housing. However, it is not clear that there is a high-quality standard applied for these applications; it is also concerning that a number of permits have subsequently been amended to reduce the social and affordable housing provision.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	<i>A Home in Moreland (2018)</i> and <i>Supplying Homes in Moreland (2019)</i> highlighted the need for more social and affordable housing. As highlighted above, housing affordability is a significant issue in Merri-bek. Merri-bek's current need for affordable housing is over 4,300 households or 6.4% of all households. Families are the largest group in need, and are in the bottom 40% of incomes (see Merri-bek Housing Monitor). The shortfall of affordable housing will increase without intervention. In 2016, the shortfall in Merri-bek was at least 4,000 and is expected to rise to between 7,000 and 10,500 by 2036.

	The lack of affordable housing for key workers is also an issue in Merri-bek. Key workers are people who work in services that are essential to the municipality's functioning, whose work roles require them to be physically present at a work site rather than being able to work from home. Many of these workers are in lower paid jobs and cannot afford to live in Merri-bek. Many live in locations that are not well serviced by public transport, and they predominantly travel to work by car. In 2021 approximately 53% of people who worked in Merri-bek, travelled to work by car. In the Household Services sector, 52% of Merri-bek workers travelled to work by car; some 12,600 people. Many of these workers also live in areas with comparatively higher levels of socio-economic vulnerability and lower levels of liveability.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	This recommendation should be included as a draft recommendation in this strategy, not a future option. Mandating more affordable homes is needed now to ensure the need for affordable housing throughout Victoria can be met. The State Government should also investigate implementing a minimum amount of social and affordable housing in new developments. A lack of overall state-wide and location-based targets was highlighted as an issue by VAGO in their review of Homes Victoria's Social and Affordable Housing Portfolio Strategy: 2024-2029. Council would welcome targets for social and affordable housing for each local government area. Having such targets will ensure that Homes Victoria and other agencies such as the Victorian Planning Authority and Development Victoria are prioritising the development of new social and affordable housing in the local government areas that need it most and have a means of tracking the progress in meeting this need.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Extend Melbourne's trams to encourage more new homes nearby
Recommendation number:	8
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ In part
2. Tell us why	While Merri -bek Council supports improvements to public transport generally, Council believes there are more important improvements that would better support the State Government's housing goals than extending the Route 58 tram through to Batman Station. There is significant opportunity for housing uplift along existing tram networks, as well as along the Upfield and Craigieburn rail lines. It is Council's position that planning scheme reforms should focus on facilitating more development along the existing tram routes, to

	encourage development of underutilised land, particularly around interchange stops. Rather than extending the tram routes, service frequency and service hours should be increased to better service the existing area. By having frequent trams, even in off peak times, these areas will become much more attractive for denser residential development. Expanding the network should be done using more cost-effective means, such as frequent and reliable bus services. The Route 58 expansion could be done for a fraction of the price, without the need for property acquisition, by pursuing a coordinated bus interchange at the Bell St terminus. Council had previously advocated for the Route 58 tram to be extended up to Boundary Road on Derby Street. Whilst this appears to be a better alignment than along Gaffney Street to Batman Station, the significant costs associated with tram extension may not produce greater benefit than some of these more immediate actions that could be taken.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Melville Road has relatively restrictive planning controls along it, limiting the feasibility of more transit-oriented development along the existing Route 58. In some large sections of the route, there is a Neighbourhood Residential Zone in place that mandates maximum building heights of two storeys. Targeted reform of some of this zoning could allow for greater use of this land along the corridor for more housing. There are good examples of bus connections at tram termini on the network in Melbourne's east. Similar interchanges at the end of tram routes can be seen in Vermont South at the end of the Route 75, and at Wattle Park at the end of the Route 70, where connections are regular and smooth, effectively expanding the network coverage of the tram routes.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Focus on enticing more residential development along the existing tram routes, particularly at interchange stops. Increase tram service frequency and service hours on Route 58. Create better bus connections at the end of Route 58 to improve public transport access in Pascoe Vale South.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Run faster bus services, more often, in Victoria's largest cities
Recommendation number:	9
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part

2. Tell us why	Merri-bek City Council has long advocated for more direct, frequent and reliable bus services, including during off-peak times, across the Merri-bek municipality and the northern region of Melbourne. The Northern Councils Alliance <i>Northern Region Transport Study</i> identified a number of key issues with bus networks across our municipality, including poor reliability, congestion and poor connectivity. The study's proposed recommendations, if acted upon, would significantly improve public transport access and use in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Running more frequent, faster, and reliable bus services will help Merri-bek residents make more sustainable transport choices, particularly for local trips. Previous reforms were very successful in terms of increasing bus patronage, including the introduction of the SmartBus services, and this work should be built upon to develop a modern, world-class bus network for Melbourne.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Council's Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy includes an action to continue advocacy to the Department of Transport and Planning for reform to the bus network in Merri-bek in line with the principles of Victoria's Bus Plan. Council is eager to see the current Bus Reform project for the North-West Region delivered, following the large-scale community and stakeholder engagement undertaken by the State Government in 2022. The Northern Councils Alliance <i>Northern Region Transport Strategy</i> identified issues with existing public transport networks in the region. The NCA <i>Bus Networking Report</i> made recommendations for improvements that were generally aligned with the Victorian Bus Plan. The recommendations included: • Improvements to existing SmartBus Routes • A high-quality route that could mimic the benefits of Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) • Improvements to key destinations – Melbourne Airport and La Trobe University • Services required in Growth Areas
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Prioritise the delivery of the Bus Reform project in Melbourne's North-West. Significant work has already been undertaken by the Department of Transport and Planning, and now is the time to fund these much need improvements. Prioritise for delivery the recommendations of the NCA Northern Region Transport Study and Bus Networking Report including: • Improvements to existing SmartBus Routes • A high-quality route that could mimic the benefits of Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) • Improvements to key destinations – Melbourne Airport and La Trobe University • Services required in Growth Areas

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Build a new bus rapid transit network
Recommendation number:	10
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) presents a great opportunity to develop much needed high-quality public transport in Melbourne's growing suburbs, without putting excessive strain on the State Government budget. In conjunction with a reform to the existing bus network in line with Recommendation 9, BRT can help improve accessibility to frequent public transport stops for more Melbournians faster than building new tram and train extensions. Better public transport connectivity across the city generally will benefit Merri-bek, by giving more people an option to travel to Merri-bek without a car, as well as increasing the number of destinations accessible by public transport for Merri-bek residents.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	The Northern Council Alliance <i>Northern Region Transport Study</i> partly looked at ways to address poor east-west public transport connectivity in Melbourne's northern suburbs. One of the key recommendations of the NCA <i>Bus Networking Report</i> was for a continuous, rapid and direct bus route that could mimic the proposed Suburb Rail Loop (SRL) North alignment, to deliver better public transport connections for Melbourne's north well before SRL North will be delivered. This report found that a BRT style transport investment would be a cost-effective way to achieve significant improvements to transport accessibility and connectivity.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Prioritise BRT options for: • a route to mimic the proposed SRL North alignment • Bell Street where there are existing public acquisition overlays • Melton-Broadmeadows route to provide connection to Melbourne Airport, and be extended to better integrate with the Upfield Line This will help people living in the northern suburbs and working at the Airport precinct have a fast and reliable public transport option to get to work.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Make off-peak public transport cheaper and simplify regional fare zones
Recommendation number:	13

1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Merri-bek Council is supportive of cheaper off-peak public transport fares. Our Transport Strategy <i>Moving Around Merri-bek</i> outlines the vision of an integrated transport system. While much of our public transport advocacy work focuses on improved frequency and accessibility, a greater spread of travel demand across the day could be beneficial to our tram and bus network as these services are often delayed by vehicular traffic. Our road network can get congested on weekends, in particular close to activity streets and centres. Encouraging visitors to use public transport on weekends is therefore supported. In some cities in Australia and overseas, weekend public transport usage is improved by family travel passes that allow accompanied children to travel free. In addition, our Council is home to many low-income earners who might not have the financial means to use public transport whenever they want. As we strive for an inclusive and accessible transport system lower off-peak fares are supported to in particular support this more vulnerable group. Allowing off-peak transport users to switch between train, bus and tram will further foster Merri-bek's integrated transport system. While Merri-bek is not directly impacted by the reduction of the number of regional fare zones we support this recommendation. Merri-bek would like to emphasise that fare reform should be matched with service upgrades, as outlined in our feedback on recommendation 9.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Click or tap here to enter text.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Click or tap here to enter text.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Make local streets safer for children and communities
Recommendation number:	14
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Merri-bek City Council strongly supports implementing safer speeds on our local streets, especially in areas with a high amount of vulnerable road user activity, such as near schools and activity centres.

3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Council is soon to decide on pursuing a trial of 30km/h speed limits across two Merri-bek sites to assess safer speed limit's impact on road safety, active travel, and community safety perceptions. During recent community engagement for our 'Moving around Merri-bek' Strategy, our community told us that 'Safety' was the highest priority theme for them, particularly prioritising pedestrian safety. Council is committed to adopting a Safe Systems approach to managing speed on our road network and keeping our residents safe on their streets. When considering vulnerable road users outside of simple 'pedestrian' or 'cyclist' profiles, we know that road trauma disproportionately affects children, the elderly and those with impaired mobility in our community. The two trial areas have been strategically selected to serve as unique case studies, providing insights into the impact of lower speed limits in different urban contexts and with different precinct approaches. Both areas have a high number of people walking and riding mixing with car traffic, being centred around schools and activity centres.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Click or tap here to enter text.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Build safe cycling networks in Melbourne and regional cities
Recommendation number:	15
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Merri-bek City Council supports the development of connected and safe cycling networks across Melbourne and regional cities. Merri-bek strongly advocates for greater connectivity and the use of on-road protected bike lanes as part of a safe and integrated transport network. Key cycling advocacy items from our recently adopted transport strategy <i>Moving around Merri-bek</i> include boosting funding for active transport and safer intersections and crossing points. These align strongly with the desire to build safe cycling networks in Melbourne and regional cities. Both protected bike lanes and resolving gaps in the cycling network should be prioritised along the identified Strategic Cycling Corridor network.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Click or tap here to enter text.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Click or tap here to enter text.

Topic/area:	Community Infrastructure
Recommendation name:	Help government schools share their grounds
Recommendation number:	16
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Government schools represent large land holdings which are often locked away from public access. Creating opportunities for access by opening gates to the public and for more structured activities creating user agreements in the form of licences could improve availability and accessibility to valuable open space and facilities for the community
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	In Merri-bek, work is underway to execute two Joint User Agreements (JUA's) with Glenroy College and Coburg High School. Currently two meetings have been held in conjunction with the schools and JUA's are being negotiated. Merri-bek City Council also supported Glenroy College with their upgrade of new turf and Council is currently working through a design of sporting infrastructure upgrades that came from a Community Budget Idea, supported within the 24/25 budget. Merri-bek City Council have two long standing JUA agreements in place with Fawkner College with the use of basketball courts and a synthetic soccer ground after hours and Brunswick High School housing the Brunswick Hockey Club's hockey pitch.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Click or tap here to enter text.

Topic/area:	Infrastructure for Victoria's First Peoples
Recommendation name:	Fund better health and wellbeing infrastructure for Aboriginal Victorians
Recommendation number:	23
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	This initiative acknowledges the critical role that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) play in supporting the health, wellbeing, and cultural needs of Aboriginal communities. By investing in the infrastructure of these organisations, it is not only strengthening the services they provide but also empowering

	communities to take control of their own health and wellbeing outcomes in a self-determined way. Providing additional annual funding to build the skills and capacity of ACCOs to plan, develop, and deliver infrastructure projects is crucial for long-term sustainability. This approach ensures that ACCOs can continue to respond to the unique needs of their communities and create health and wellbeing infrastructure that reflects their priorities, values, and cultural practices. With the right support, ACCOs will be better positioned to deliver effective services while fostering local leadership and knowledge. The establishment of an interim fund for minor works and repairs is an important step in addressing immediate infrastructure needs. It provides a timely solution to ensure that existing facilities are maintained and remain functional while longer-term planning and funding are underway. Ultimately, this recommendation will not only address the urgent need for upgraded infrastructure but will also create a lasting, self-determined pathway for Aboriginal communities to improve their health and wellbeing over time. In summary, funding for health and wellbeing infrastructure for ACCOs is an investment in Aboriginal self-determination, community empowerment, and better health outcomes.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	The Supporting and Advancing Aboriginal Communities in Metropolitan Melbourne report outlines issues of self-determination for Aboriginal communities, the needs and how services can support wellbeing outcomes.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Broaden the scope to include both physical infrastructure (buildings, facilities) and digital infrastructure (information technology, online access and supports, health management systems, telehealth platforms) to improve the outcomes for community. Infrastructure projects should address both the immediate needs for physical spaces and the long-term sustainability of digital tools that are essential for modern social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal community. This ensures that ACCOs are equipped for both in-person and remote service delivery. It also increases access for community to resources.

Topic/area:	Climate Change
Recommendation name:	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from infrastructure
Recommendation number:	24
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Merri-bek City Council has been active in measuring, reporting and reducing our organisational carbon emissions. A great deal of work

	has been done on reducing our scope 1 and 2 emissions (e.g., purchasing electric vehicles, electrifying our sites, purchasing electricity backed by renewable certificates). However, we are conscious that by comparison, we are at an early stage in measuring and reducing emissions associated with our capital works. It is difficult to gather accurate data on quantities of steel, concrete, etc used in construction projects. Even if the data is available, there is a near-complete dearth of reliable, public emission factors. A public database of verified emission factors, and/or if suppliers were encouraged to publish verified emission factors, would assist. Even if a carbon hotspot is identified, there are few clear low-carbon alternatives at a reasonable price-point. Resolving these problems should be prioritised. The planning process is a key contributor to sustainable buildings. Merri-bek has a long history of setting high ESD standards for planning applicants. Recent state planning reforms erode many of these gains and are concerning. Council encourages the State Government to play a statewide leadership role with higher ESD standards and solving some common problems (such as EV charging infrastructure standards).
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Council recently commissioned a life-cycle assessment (LCA) on a new cultural and community hub at 33 Saxon St, Brunswick, and is open to sharing the findings from this LCA. Key findings were that construction of this building emitted over 4ktCO₂e, compared to our annual operational emissions of 7.5ktCO₂e. Other councils have estimated that total emissions associated with their capital works is six times higher than their operational emissions. The LCA report recommended that we consider mass timber in future to replace steel or concrete. It also recommended that we avoid steel in facade structures. Current Planning Scheme settings often put heritage and renewables infrastructure in conflict – an area where state leadership is needed. Likewise, the absence of standards for EV charging, particularly in inner city suburbs where many properties do not have driveways, is a material gap.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Deliver a public database of emission factors and/or require suppliers to publish verified emission factors for their products. It would also be useful to provide organisations with a list of potential 'quick wins' e.g., using mass timber rather than steel and concrete where possible. Such quick wins could be included in specifications to steer architects. Planning scheme improvements as detailed above would be welcomed.
Topic/area:	Water
Recommendation name:	Advance integrated water management and use more recycled water

Recommendation number:	25
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ In part
2. Tell us why	Planning for manufactured water is essential for future water security. However, the framing should be broader than recycled water and include stormwater as a parallel manufactured source. Stormwater harvesting systems—particularly when paired with treatment and reuse infrastructure—are a form of decentralised manufactured water and can be rapidly deployed in growth areas. Deployment can also be at a residential lot scale such as installation of a water tank. With recent reform to Clause 55, alternative levers for requiring re-use of water may now be required through the plumbing and building regulations.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	The IWM Forum catchment plans and healthy waterways strategy set ambitious targets for both stormwater and recycled water use as part of achieving integrated and sustainable water management. However, analysis and investigations consistently show that stormwater targets are unlikely to be met without stronger policy alignment and investment in fit-for-purpose reuse infrastructure.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Reframe the recommendation to "Advance integrated water management and use more recycled water and stormwater." Work with partners to fund and deliver integrated water management projects. Determine the costs and benefits of introducing recycled drinking water in Melbourne and Geelong and build a pilot recycled drinking water facility. Incorporate stormwater trials within pilot facilities or separate demonstration sites to test its potential for broader integration into water supply portfolios. Deliver a community education campaign on the need for more alternative water sources. Require rainwater tanks for residential development through the plumbing and building regulations

Topic/area:	Water
Recommendation name:	Plan for and invest in manufactured water
Recommendation number:	Future Option
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ In part

2. Tell us why	We support this recommendation in part because, while the full-scale implementation of manufactured water solutions may be a longer-term objective, planning and groundwork must begin within the next five years to enable that future. Critical early actions — such as identifying priority locations, engaging with Traditional Owners, trialling decentralised stormwater systems, and aligning land use and infrastructure planning — require time, coordination, and leadership. Delaying these steps risks missing key opportunities to integrate manufactured water into major growth areas and to deliver environmental and cultural water outcomes. Stormwater, already defined as a form of manufactured water, must be planned for and invested in alongside desalination and large-scale recycling. Without a strong planning foundation now, Victoria may fall short of long-term water security, environmental protection, and equity goals.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	The IWM Forum catchment plans set ambitious targets for both stormwater and recycled water use as part of achieving integrated and sustainable water management. However, evidence from stormwater investigations across Melbourne's growth corridors consistently shows that stormwater targets will not be met without policy reform, early planning, and investment in fit-for-purpose reuse infrastructure.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Reclassify this recommendation as a priority action, not a Future Option, to ensure essential planning begins within the next 5 years. Support pilot projects that trial manufactured water solutions, particularly in growth areas, for environmental and cultural flows. Develop a statewide manufactured water strategy that includes decentralised models and supports long-term resilience. Ensure planning and infrastructure investment are aligned across water, land use, and environmental portfolios.

Topic/area:	Climate Change
Recommendation name:	Better use government land for open space and greenery
Recommendation number:	26
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Merri-bek Council recently resolved to approach the State Government about collaborating with Council in delivering urban greening initiatives, especially tree planting and landscaping, in rail corridors, arterial road corridors, state schools and on other state-owned land, and also providing funding and resource support for

	maintenance of greening projects delivered on State Government land and assets. State Government and state authorities are responsible for large land holdings which are locked away from public access. Creating opportunities for access by gifting land to local government or creating user agreements in the form of licences could improve availability and accessibility to valuable open space for the community. Government should proactively review land not currently available to the public and work with local government on ways to provide access or secure land for public open space uses.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Melbourne Water have recently been working with Merri-bek City Council to create access to several land parcels used as retarding basins in Glenroy that have previously been locked away behind high fencing to prohibit public access. This is a great example of an authority working with local government to unlock land for the community. In the recent master-planning for McDonald Reserve in Coburg, discussions with Coburg High School, located adjacent to McDonald Reserve, have been integral to the plan. The proposed plan is, with a proposed new hockey pitch on the reserve, for overflow activities to be moved to the Coburg High School oval after school hours, with reciprocal use of the hockey pitch by the school. We are also advocating to replace state-controlled impervious surfaces in Merri-bek with plants (e.g., trees for canopy, vines for walls) or porous surfaces to help reduce the urban heat island effect, enhance biodiversity, and improve residents' well-being. Identifying key State infrastructure in Merri-bek where greening interventions can be implemented, including on vertical surfaces.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	

Topic/area:	Climate Change
Recommendation name:	Better prepare infrastructure for climate change
Recommendation number:	27
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Funding is needed for capital works to upgrade community facilities that deliver vital services to our communities, such as senior citizens centres, early years' centres, libraries and neighbourhood houses.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Merri-bek City Council conducted two rounds of building vulnerability analysis to investigate the climate impacts on a subset of community buildings. Initial cost estimates for upgrades and retrofits for a sample of 13 smaller community buildings amount to \$2.8 million.

	Typical works in these buildings include upgrades of split air conditioning systems, insulation, external shade structures, operability of windows and doors, and other similar works. For context, Merri-bek City Council owns and manages about 51 community buildings with similar functions. We need to work in partnership to fund the upgrades and retrofits of buildings to continue to serve our community. Bigger facilities such as libraries, town halls, and other large venues may require much larger funding, as will larger pieces of work like roof replacement, thermal zoning of large spaces, and other works. In the face of climate change and increasing frequency of disasters, social infrastructure is even more important in supporting connection, information sharing, and resilience in the community.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Federal and State funding should be provided to support local councils to improve the resilience of infrastructure, including through nature-based solutions like greening and water sensitive infrastructure, to continue to provide community services.

Topic/area:	Climate Change
Recommendation name:	Use new flood maps to revise planning schemes
Recommendation number:	28
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	The October 2022 floods in Victoria raised awareness to flood hazards and the ongoing benefit of an effective planning system. Within the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs), the appropriate floodplain management tools for use in metropolitan Melbourne are the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay (LSIO) and the Special Building Overlay (SBO) for land development. For urban areas such as those in Merri-bek, the LSIO is used for mapping riverine flood hazards, whilst the SBO is used for mapping stormwater overland flows in urban catchments. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Melbourne Water facilitated an urban stormwater mapping program for its main drainage catchments within metropolitan Melbourne. This mapping did not include any local drainage catchments, which are commonly managed by local drainage authorities. This decision by the regional Floodplain Management Authority (FMA) has impeded the ability of planning schemes to ‘tell the full story’ for mapping land which may be affected by 100-year storm events. Rather, the FMA has relied on individual councils to fund and enable mapping for its local catchments. The preparation of 100-year maps relies on specialist drainage experts. The work done by these experts is drawn from national guidelines, known as Australian Rainfall and Runoff (AR&R). These

	guidelines continue to evolve in response to climate change variables. This evolution, and other factors which inform the preparation of maps by experts, means such mapping needs to be effectively updated and maintained over time. State Government and/or FMA funding support is needed if local government is to be expected to maintain its SBO maps. Whilst achieving technically effective maps is a critical ingredient to delivering new or updated LSIO or SBO maps for planning schemes, of equal importance is the drainage authorities' approach to also doing drainage works. Recently, MW has been focusing on the rollout of a mapping program for metro-Melbourne. Merri-bek acknowledges that this mapping effort is important and needs to be implemented into all metro-area planning schemes as soon as possible. However, Merri-bek is not aware of any recent discussions for structural solutions to reducing stormwater and flood risks affecting MW's regional drainage network.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	The 2005 VAGO report, '<i>Managing stormwater flooding risks in Melbourne</i>' highlights that an effective approach towards managing food risks involves 'structural' (e.g. works) and 'non-structural' (e.g. use of maps) actions to reduce these risks. Merri-bek has a history of experiencing major storm events. This history, and Council's desire to be proactive, has enabled the preparation of 100-year stormwater overland flow maps for the city's local catchments. This was an expensive exercise to complete and involved drainage engineering experts doing much modelling and mapping to produce the C196more Special Building Overlay Schedule 2 (SBO2) map. An important part of progressing C196more was having a Drainage Improvement Plan to demonstrate to the community where Council was planning to make investments to its drainage network to reduce the risk of stormwater overland flows.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Flag the need for engagement and communication for a long-term metro drainage works package that helps to reduce risks in prioritised locations within our established suburbs.

Topic/area:	Climate Change
Recommendation name:	Invest in home, neighbourhood and big batteries for more energy storage
Recommendation number:	31
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ In part
2. Tell us why	Neighbourhood or community batteries may have the potential to offer significant benefits. Due to their size, they are more complex to connect than a home or small commercial battery and therefore cost

	more and can be very difficult to deliver direct benefits to households. Furthermore, their demonstrated value back to communities has yet to be clearly identified. While federal and state grant programs have been promoted, at times it can be difficult to realise benefits. Without significant change to the approach to these programs, either in making it easier for smaller-scale community retail models or offering grants for behind-the-meter programs, Council believes it is too early to recommend their continued deployment. Under 'business as usual' conditions, the deployment of batteries is unlikely to address the likely inequality that will continue to occur as part of the energy transition. As a result, those who need the benefits derived from batteries the most, are unlikely to be their recipients.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	The Yarra Energy Foundation, operators of the first neighbourhood battery in Victoria, have published their <u>first two years of performance/ operation</u>, which has been much lower than expected. The other example of a successful Victorian community battery comes from a rural setting where a community came together to create a microgrid. This is not the situation in urban settings. A key financial stream for community or neighbourhood batteries is Frequency Control Ancillary Services (FCAS). With many 'big' grid scale batteries coming online recently and providing these services, the likely revenue from FCAS is likely to reduce further over time, making these mid-scale batteries more exposed to lower financial returns.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Adopt a similar approach to South Australia, whereby a specific funding avenue is made available to social, community and public housing as well as indigenous/ aboriginal housing to install batteries that reduce electricity costs and improve resilience. This approach is recommended rather than include a specific neighbourhood or community battery stream.

Topic/area:	Climate Change
Recommendation name:	Speed up household energy efficiency and electrification
Recommendation number:	34
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	Efficient electric homes, powered by renewable electricity are healthier, cheaper to run, and a low-cost pathway to achieve Victoria's emissions targets. Merri-bek encourages the Victorian Government to be ambitious in its gas substitution plans, including the phase out of all gas appliances in existing residential properties,

	to ensure that all Victorians can realise the full cost savings associated with a fully electrified home. Recent analysis from the Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis found that an existing Victorian home that switches all of its gas appliances to efficient electric alternatives once they wear out could save over \$1,300 per year. Efficient electric appliances will normally cost more, with the extra costs being recouped in about three years. However, most households will be eligible for government rebates and may find the efficient electric appliances are cheaper than staying with gas. Burning gas for cooking poses health risks such as asthma, particularly for children. Research indicates that cooking with gas can increase the chance of a child having asthma by 32 per cent, and that up to 12 per cent of childhood asthma in Australia is attributed to gas cooking. In market research conducted by Merri-bek Council in 2021 into resident's attitudes to electrification the main drawbacks of household gas appliances that participants mention unprompted, relate to human health and safety.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	To ensure that all households can receive the benefits of efficient electrification targeted place-based programs and financial support is needed for households on a low-income. Research demonstrates that participation in market-based incentive programs (such as rebates or certificate schemes) result in lower participation from areas with lower economic resources, despite these being the cohorts who need it most. Since late 2020, Merri-bek has provided a concierge service for low-income households to either install a solar PV system or improve the thermal performance of their home with insulation and/or draught sealing measures. The program has supported 385 residents improve the comfort of their homes and reduce energy bills. Combined, all participants are saving an estimated \$216,000 annually off their energy bills, and some \$3.7 million over the lifetime of the home upgrades. The success of the Merri-bek program comes from careful, yet deliberate program design which includes: • A personalised concierge service provided by staff to support the household throughout the various program stages, including eligibility, suitability of program offerings, right through to completion. • A foundation of trust that's established by Council with the household from the outset and is based on not only using experienced, vetted service providers, but Council's commitment to serving its community. • Targeted engagement and promotional activities including utilising Merri-bek's innovative "Community Connectors" network, translation and interpretative services, to maximise program awareness and uptake. • Dedicated assistance in navigating the sometimes-complex process of applying for State Government rebates. • Financial subsidies provided by Council (up to \$3,000 for solar or \$2,000 for thermal) to address the up-front cost challenges. Merri-bek Council has built support and the social license for electrification in our local community and across Victoria. In late 2021, Merri-bek launched its Electrify Everything: Communications

	Message Guide for Households. An Australian-first, the guide is based on market research undertaken with residents to promote the health, safety and environmental benefits of switching appliances to electric. Merri-bek is now leading a Community of Practice with over 44 local councils from across Victoria focused on communicating the importance of electrification. In 2023, local councils delivered a collaborative campaign reaching over 677,000 households. The campaign used consistent information in everyday language that reached diverse communities with trusted communicators. A multi-level governance approach is needed to implement efficient electrification programs that leverages the respective capabilities and resources of each sphere of government, such as local governments connection to community and ability to roll-out place-based programs. Merri-bek is one of three Councils partnering with the SECV and the roll-out Electric Home Planner. The pilot has shown the benefits of collaboration utilising the strengths and capabilities of state and local government.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Council is concerned that apartments are continually put in the "too hard basket" when it comes to efficient electrification. Merri-bek has a very high proportion of residents living in apartments with 48.2% of households in medium and high-density housing. As the transition to clean energy and lower electricity bills accelerates, Victorians living in apartments must not be left behind. Whilst dedicated programs can run in parallel, to ensure the electrification of apartment buildings there is a need to: Develop a dedicated strategy for upgrading and electrifying apartments. Develop an apartment electrification strategy that is built from the ground-up and based on the complex governance and legislative environment of apartments rather than as an add on to residential or commercial buildings. The strategy needs to be developed in collaboration with apartment industry associations, apartment owners and service providers. Deliver legislative reform Update the Owners Corporations Act 2006 to lower decision-making thresholds for passing special and interim resolutions relating to sustainability projects. The current requirement of 75% of owners in favour of a resolution is a barrier to energy upgrades. The Victorian requirement needs to be reduced to a simple majority of 50% as in place in New South Wales. Work with local government to support place-based electrification communications and delivery programs Councils have a proven history in delivering energy efficiency and renewable energy projects with their communities. Councils are a trusted source within their communities, they have a wealth of knowledge and capacity to help deliver the electrification of Victorian homes.

Topic/area:	Cities
Recommendation name:	Reform infrastructure contributions
Recommendation number:	36
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	The need for increased developer contributions is necessary to ensure Councils can deliver the necessary community infrastructure to meet a growing population. Developer Contribution Plans (DCPs) as they currently operate can often last for 10-20 years, while a Council term is limited to 4-years, which often results in changing priorities. A more flexible and simplified DCP model should be developed to enable Council to direct funds to where it is needed as Council priorities change (like open space contributions), and which reduces the administrative burden on Councils in preparing and implementing a DCP. A more realistic public open space developer contribution that better reflects the complexity and cost of open space planning in an established municipality like Merri-bek is also required. Currently there is no planning practice note or guidelines to inform the creation or review of a public open space contribution rate, meaning Councils are developing methods without any overarching State Government guidance. This leads to increased costs for Councils having to defend a methodology and reviewing if not supported by Planning Panels. Assistance from the Victorian Government is also required to ensure state authority owned land used as public open space is retained as public open space (without Council needing to use Council funds to secure this outcome). Government is currently undertaking major reform to developer contributions and this process would benefit from much greater transparency and much more engagement with local government in its design. The public messaging suggests that the State may be intending to use the reform to utilise DCP funds to fund state infrastructure, directing even more funds away from critical local infrastructure investment. We are concerned that a Merri-bek Council-endorsed Open Space Contributions amendment is being held without any clarity on whether or when it might be allowed to progress.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	When Council progressed a planning scheme amendment for a development contributions plan in 2013, it took two years for this amendment to be finalised and put into the planning scheme.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Legislative reform is required to ensure Build to Rent developments make a fair contribution to public open space. This development typology is becoming more prevalent and because there is no subdivision, a public open space contribution is not payable. This means that current ratepayers are fully funding open space that future residents of built to rent developments will benefit from.

Topic/area:	Circular Economy
Recommendation name:	Prepare for more recycling and waste infrastructure
Recommendation number:	38
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ In part
2. Tell us why	Planning is required to appropriately locate and manage additional recycling infrastructure in Victoria for priority materials including e-waste, paper/cardboard, plastics, textiles and organics. Council is strongly supportive of establishing mandatory product stewardship schemes and the need to plan for infrastructure to service such schemes. However, to actualise the principles of a circular economy it is essential to move beyond recycling and the use of secondary materials to closed loop systems that enable reuse, repair and refurbishment of existing products and materials. The recommendation does not appear to have a focus on infrastructure to enable these circular economy activities higher on the waste hierarchy than 'recycling'. Such higher order activities require reverse logistics and space, for storing parts and materials, salvage activities, etc. However, they generally do not have as substantial environmental and amenity impacts as recycling infrastructure, hence they have potential to be more distributed across metropolitan and regional centres. To put downward pressure on waste generation, planning and support for this type of infrastructure is a critical element to enable the circular economy and must be considered alongside planning for more conventional waste and recycling / composting infrastructure needs. Merri-bek City Council views Waste to Energy as a far less desirable option than waste reduction, re-use and recycling. Waste to Energy facilities are costly, polluting, and result in the destruction of resources. They also divert funds away from investing in better resource recovery outcomes. Rather than increasing the State cap for Waste to Energy on the assumption that waste generation will continue to increase, we need much more consistent investment in waste avoidance through behaviour change programs, pricing, regulation and other incentives. In line with the objectives of the waste hierarchy and principles of a circular economy, Merri-bek City Council supports the regional development of non-thermal advanced waste processing technologies such as anaerobic digestion, mechanical biological treatment and in-vessel composting where the outputs produced can be captured and used. To support better recycling outcomes legislative reform is also needed to mandate whole-of-life management of priority products/materials such as batteries, textiles and e-waste. These waste streams are growing and require urgent attention. The Victorian Government should follow the lead of NSW by introducing the Product Lifecycle Responsibility Bill which requires battery brand owners to participate in a regulated product stewardship scheme,

	ensuring the responsible end-of-life management of batteries. Regulated schemes such as this are essential to ensuring that the collection and disposal costs of products are not shifted by brands to local government.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Click or tap here to enter text.
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Legislative reform is required to mandate whole-of-life responsibility by producers for priority products and materials such as batteries, e-waste, packaging and textiles, this would include requirements to invest in the necessary infrastructure to manage products at end-of-life.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Create and preserve opportunities for future major infrastructure projects
Recommendation number:	43
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
2. Tell us why	The government should prepare now for major infrastructure projects that Victoria is likely to need in the long term, particularly: • complete a preliminary business case and detailed engineering assessment to reconfigure the City Loop (see future option – Reconfigure the City Loop for more frequent trains) • complete detailed assessments to extend and electrify metropolitan trains to Melbourne's north and south-east growth areas (see future option – Extend metropolitan trains to growth areas in Melbourne's north and south-east) • complete a preliminary business case for the Melbourne Metro 2 tunnel project, confirm its route and protect the land needed to build it. The Upfield and Craigieburn train lines, which serve the people of Merri-bek and our growing northern communities, continuing to share the same City Loop tracks has been identified by Infrastructure Victoria as an ongoing constraint to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers along both lines. Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051 recommended: <i>Within the next two years, complete a business case to reconfigure the City Loop, including determining its timing. Include planning for more frequent metropolitan services on the Craigieburn, Upfield, Frankston, and Glen Waverley services...</i> The completion of the Melbourne Metro 1 will remove Sunbury line trains from the current loop, enabling more pathways for northern group trains to become available at North Melbourne Railway

	Station. However, the Craigieburn and Upfield lines will continue to share the same line. The housing activity centres of Brunswick and Coburg are on the Upfield line as well as North Essendon and Broadmeadows on the Craigieburn line. To support the population, rail services will need to be improved on both the Upfield and Craigieburn lines, which will require and increased service frequency which requires major investment in the city loop reconfiguration. Reconfiguring the City Loop would separate the Craigieburn and Upfield lines and remove the current bottleneck. This separation would mean the 2 lines no longer share the same City Loop track. It would reduce the risk of disruptions on one line affecting others. A coordinated and timely reconfiguration of the City Loop could also allow for the line to be extended further north to Wallan.
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	Rail projects identified in this recommendation (City loop reconfiguration, Melbourne Metro 2 and electrification of services) should be included as recommendations in this strategy, not as a future option. See responses to Future Option “Reconfigure the City Loop for more frequent and reliable trains” and “Extend metropolitan trains to growth areas in Melbourne’s north and south-east” for more details. The government’s aim of 60 housing activity centres our rail network will require turn up and go levels of rail service to support the demand. The current configuration of our rail network, particularly in the northern suburbs does not support this. For service frequency to improve the network and will require continued major infrastructure investment.

Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Reconfigure the City Loop for more frequent and reliable trains
Recommendation number:	Future Option
5. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ In part
Tell us why	The Upfield and Craigieburn train lines continuing to share the same City Loop tracks has been identified by Infrastructure Victoria as an ongoing constraint to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers along both lines. Victoria’s Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051 recommended: <i>Within the next two years, complete a business case to reconfigure the City Loop, including determining its timing. Include planning for more frequent metropolitan services on the Craigieburn, Upfield, Frankston, and Glen Waverley services...</i>

	The completion of the Melbourne Metro 1 will remove Sunbury line trains from the current loop, enabling more pathways for northern group trains to become available at North Melbourne Railway Station. However, the Craigieburn and Upfield lines will continue to share the same line. Reconfiguring the City Loop would separate the Craigieburn and Upfield lines and remove the current bottleneck. This separation would mean the two lines no longer share the same City Loop track. It would reduce the risk of disruptions on one line affecting others. A coordinated and timely reconfiguration of the City Loop could also allow for the line to be extended further north to Wallan.
6. Share any supporting evidence or examples	Despite the importance of this rail line to the growth of Melbourne and the people it serves, the Upfield line has one of the least frequent peak period services in Melbourne's rail network. Trains run every 15 to 20 minutes during peak periods, every 20 to 30 minutes outside the peak on weekdays and every 20 to 60 minutes on weekends. Public Transport Victoria (PTV) has previously projected the Upfield line to experience the largest yearly rise in passengers of all city trains between 2021 and 2031, with patronage set to grow by 5.3% a year over the decade.
7. Include proposed changes and improvements	This recommendation should be included as a recommendation in this strategy, not a future option. The duplication and upgrade of the Upfield line should also be included in this recommendation. Investment in the reconfiguration of the city loop and the duplication of the Upfield rail line between Gowrie and Upfield stations is urgently needed to address constraints on the worst performing rail line in Melbourne's rail network. Without the duplication between Gowrie and Upfield stations, single track service between Gowrie and Upfield Stations will continue to create significant bottlenecks and constraints to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers. Upfield line stations Fawkner, Merlynston, Gowrie and Batman have the most infrequent train services in the state, with the four northern train services beyond Coburg among the lowest rated for commuter experiences. Batman is rated 4.45 out of 10, Merlynston is rated 4.05 out of 10 and Fawkner is rated 3.88 out of 10. At 3.64 out of 10, Gowrie ranks the lowest for train services in Victoria.
Topic/area:	Transport
Recommendation name:	Extend metropolitan trains to growth areas in Melbourne's north and south-east
Recommendation number:	Future Option
8. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	☒ Yes ☐ No

	☐ In part
9. Tell us why	The extension and electrification of the Upfield line to Wallan will support desperately needed increased capacity at the existing Wallan and Donnybrook Stations, along with future stations at Beveridge and Cloverton. This includes connecting the Upfield line to the Craigieburn line at Roxburgh Park to allow full utilisation of the Upfield tracks and become the major corridor for suburban services from Wallan. This will significantly improve public transport network benefits and enable residents in growth areas to easily access education, health, jobs and social connections in inner and middle Melbourne. In turn, this will reduce car ownership in the Northern Growth Corridor.
10. Share any supporting evidence or examples	In Melbourne's northern region, rates of growth in Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell are substantially higher than Victorian Government projections. In Mitchell alone, there were 1,400 lots created over 2022–2023. It is projected that Mitchell's population will double almost every five years for at least the next 20 years. Mitchell's growth areas alone will be home to approximately 80,000 people within 10 years (up from approximately 28,000 currently) and ultimately will support a population of over 230,000. In Hume, the population was 246,850 in 2021, an increase of almost 80,000 or 50 per cent of its 2011 population, which was 167,562. The Hume and Whittlesea communities are expected to grow to 394,760 and 360,692 respectively by 2041. Population growth in the area will be even higher if the Victorian Government's housing targets are met. It has been advised that the V/Line services were expected to reach capacity by 2030. But higher than forecast growth accelerated by the impacts of the COVID pandemic, coupled with the Precinct Structure Plan areas developing faster than anticipated, mean that capacity is likely to be reached in 2025–2026. Many services, particularly at peak times and on weekends, are already running at or over capacity, with passengers regularly required to stand on journeys that can last over 80 minutes. Growth communities in Mitchell, Whittlesea and Hume (including Wallan, Beveridge, Lockyerbie, Donnybrook and the future Cloverton MAC) are currently serviced by diesel V/Line services only, with a total of five services in the morning peak. The electric line and metropolitan train services terminate at Craigieburn. This cuts passenger capacity by more than half, as a V/Line train carries about 40 per cent of the passengers of a comparable electric metropolitan train.
11. Include proposed changes and improvements	This recommendation should be included as a recommendation in this strategy, not a future option. Investment in the extension of metropolitan trains in the north is needed now.

