



28 April 2025

Mr Jonathan Spear
Chief Executive Officer
Infrastructure Victoria
Level 33/140 William St
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Mr Spear

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy 2025-2055**.

For three decades NORTH Link has advocated for improved infrastructure in Melbourne's North, with a strong body of work having been widely shared.

This includes the following documents:

- NORTH Link Pre-Budget Submission 2025/26 - <https://northlink.org.au/north-link-2025-26-pre-budget-submission-standing-up-for-melbournes-north/>
- Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy
<https://northlink.org.au/melbournes-north-investment-attraction-strategy/>
- Northern Horizons - <https://northlink.org.au/research>

In short, there is an urgent requirement to plan infrastructure around projected rapid population growth, with Melbourne's North set to grow by 44 per cent out to 2036.

With a constrained fiscal environment ahead, an emphasis on providing infrastructure at least cost and also stimulating private sector investment to assist in this task is essential.

This might involve opting, in some cases, for least cost options, for example fast buses rather than trains as required so that the economic and social benefits of infrastructure spending are brought forward.

Furthermore, NORTH Link believes Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year strategy requires a next step – detailed, integrated infrastructure plans for Melbourne's North with horizon 1, 2 and 3 priorities set out with timelines and costings. Co-ordination of departments in doing this work would reduce silo effects and improve strategic clarity for the State. This will also add certainty for the private sector in terms of the aforementioned aim of attracting further private sector investment into the region.

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We make comments on the following recommendations:

4 Expand TAFE in Melbourne's growth areas and some large regional centres

We strongly support the recommendation to "expand TAFE campuses in Melbourne's west, north and south-east growth areas, and some large regional centres, to train more students to fill skills gaps, especially in construction, energy and health." There will be a need for TAFE and University facilities in the growing Outer North.

We note that La Trobe University and Melbourne Polytechnic have agreed to explore the opportunity to establish a future campus in Melbourne's outer north centred around the Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre to meet the tertiary education needs of a rapidly growing population. Cloverton will be a new city the size of Canberra and service a forecasted population of 380,000 residents from the suburbs of Cloverton, Mickleham, Kalkallo, Donnybrook, Beveridge and Wallan. Cloverton is close to the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal, which is expected to be completed by 2029 and will support up to 20,000 jobs in the region (La Trobe University and Melbourne Polytechnic, *Communique - Planning for the tertiary education needs of Melbourne's outer North*, April 2025).

8 Extend Melbourne's trams to encourage more new homes nearby

This recommendation is agreed but the extension of the Melville Road tram to Batman Station requires further explanation and assessment of local support.

10 Build a new bus rapid transit network

Given the projected cost of the Suburban Rail Network, a substitute fast bus should be considered for the short-to-medium term – it would be considerably cheaper than an underground rail line and bring benefits more quickly to commuters, as well as freeing up valuable capital for other urgent and important uses, enabling the Suburban Rail Loop to be built over a longer period if required.

The Northern Councils Alliance, with the support of NORTH Link, has set out a major bus network strategy to improve the network of buses that connect the Melbourne's north community to major precincts and health and education facilities, as outlined in the Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks - <https://www.connectmelbournenorth.com/busnetworks>. This includes but is not limited to: improved services to Melbourne Airport and La Trobe University, improved SmartBus access, increased northern growth corridor services and, as previously outlined, buses replicating the future Suburban Rail Loop route. We note that there are particular problems with a lack of east-west transit in Melbourne's North and, consequently, residents accessing employment centres that need to be addressed. Furthermore, bus, tram and train timetables need to be better aligned.

20 Upgrade critical public hospital infrastructure

With the addition of some 500,000 new residents in the region out to 2026, a new public hospital in Melbourne's Outer North will be required and planning should begin immediately for such as a site in the Cloverton MAC. Currently Northern Health in Epping operates the busiest emergency room in Victoria and has one of the State's busiest maternity wards, and will be stretched servicing several hundred thousand extra residents set to live in Melbourne's Outer North.

Future Option - Extend metropolitan trains to growth areas in Melbourne's north and south-east

This option rightly indicates that "Extending the train network can improve access to local jobs".

However, the option calls for the electrification of the rail line from Craigieburn to Kalkallo. The northern suburbs now extend to Wallan, with new stations at Cloverton and Beveridge. New estates are rapidly being built around Wallan and Beveridge and the presence of the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal from the second half of this decade will supercharge economic activity in this area.

Furthermore, extending metropolitan trains in Melbourne's North is classified as a future option when it should be a major recommendation given the population growth in the municipalities of Hume, Mitchell and Whittlesea – population growth in Melbourne's North will make up 30 per cent of Melbourne's population growth.

Conclusions - Jobs for residents and the link with public transport

A major infrastructure problem in Melbourne's North is the lack of public transport connectivity to key strategic economic and employment centres such as La Trobe University and Melbourne Airport.

La Trobe University is the worst connected university in Melbourne by public transport. The broader La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster has the poorest public transport accessibility of the six original Plan Melbourne NEICs (Stanley and Brain 2016). The 70th percentile public transport trip to La Trobe NEIC is almost two hours in the morning peak, including access-egress time and wait/transfer times. As a result, of all the NEICs, La Trobe relies least on public transport.

Melbourne Airport and the surrounding business park supports over 20,000 jobs – it is a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week employment hub and public transport in particular does not support its shift workers. Even the addition of Melbourne Airport Rail will not fully assist those workers trying to access Melbourne Airport from the north and east.

Likewise, Northern Health's Epping Campus, supports many thousands of workers and is also poorly connected to public transport. The need for a spur rail line off the Mernda Line from Lalor to Wollert would be enormously beneficial in linking residents to jobs at Northern Health and other locations in the Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre.

Given this poor level of connectivity to jobs precincts, it is hardly surprising that Melbourne's North has less jobs than workers living within the region, with an outflow of workers on a daily basis to Melbourne's CBD and other locations forecast to continue. For the gap between local jobs and resident workers to be closed, a further 182,000 local jobs would be required by 2031.

Thus, there is a rationale to build up key precincts in Melbourne's North and support them with appropriate infrastructure, which is outlined fully in the document [Melbourne's North Investment Attraction Strategy](#). The Strategy provides an assessment of the key employment precincts in the Melbourne's North region, including the investment opportunities, infrastructure challenges and recommended actions to attract further investment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely



Chris James
Executive Director