

Response to Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy

The Northern Councils Alliance (NCA) welcomes the release of Infrastructure Victoria's draft infrastructure strategy 2025-2055 and acknowledges the work that has gone into shaping its recommendations.

We are pleased to see the strategy's emphasis on housing, jobs and opportunities. These are critical priorities for our rapidly growing region.

However, our comprehensive research highlights a broader and more urgent need for investment in transport infrastructure across Melbourne's north than what was recommended in the report.

With our population projected to grow by 44 per cent by 2036 – making up nearly 30 per cent of Melbourne's future expansion – the demand for efficient transport links and essential services will only intensify. Immediate consideration is required to meet the infrastructure needs of our region.

Our community across the northern metropolitan area navigates severe road congestion, fragmented transport networks and mounting pressure on health services. Without targeted action, these challenges will continue to constrain economic growth and limit access to jobs, education and healthcare.

The NCA, representing the seven councils of Melbourne's north (Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Merri-bek, Mitchell, Nillumbik and Whittlesea) has undertaken extensive, evidence-based research to identify the critical infrastructure investments needed to support our communities.

The following summary outlines our strategic priorities, developed to ensure that Melbourne's north receives the funding and infrastructure it requires to thrive now and into the future.

Regional transport strategy

We believe that the optimum way forward for transport in our state would be through development of a Victorian Transport Plan by the Victorian Government that takes into consideration our comprehensive transport research. Our reports clearly outline investment priorities that will improve public transport connectivity and encourage sustainable transport growth across this region. They identify

projects that will better coordinate regional investment and maximise engagement with governments.

The documents were developed using consensus-based decision making and informed by evidence and analysis. They were designed to align governments and stakeholders in improving the transport network to help fully realise the potential of our fast-growing region.

See: [Northern Region Transport Strategy](#) and [Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks](#)

Large scale transport infrastructure

Our region needs approval and funding support for large-scale transport infrastructure investments with significant regional benefits, as identified in our *Northern Horizons* documents.

Key priorities for our region include:

- Upfield rail extension: duplication and extension, including electrification to Wallan, will connect three municipalities, linking outer residents to inner jobs and vice versa, and futureproofing growth in outer suburbs
- Clifton Hill rail exchange: will increase capacity on Hurstbridge and Mernda lines, both currently at capacity and expecting future growth
- building of the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road/E6
- planning for Melbourne Metro 2.

These are major projects that will provide true connectivity across the region, linking residents to jobs, education and health facilities. Delivery of priority infrastructure projects will generate the biggest return on investment in terms of economic growth, new jobs and stimulating economic recovery.

Improved bus networks

We need an efficient network of buses that connect our community to major precincts and health and education facilities. While the new draft strategy highlights a plan for a Northland to Mernda bus as part of a bus rapid transit network, due for completion after the early 2030s, we believe that a more comprehensive bus network is urgently needed across Melbourne's north.

Our *Bus Networks Study* recommends key actions that will significantly improve connectivity across the region. A Suburban Rail Loop Rapid Bus would provide

a continuous, rapid and direct east-west public transport connection from Melbourne Airport to Box Hill, mimicking the proposed alignment of SRL north stations.

A realignment of SmartBus services, in particular one that terminates at Melbourne Airport, would improve access to jobs, education and health services, as well as maximise patronage and connectivity.

La Trobe University is poorly served by public transport compared with other universities. Lowering the need to drive to campus would reduce congestion in connecting roads across the region and reduce transport costs for students.

Melbourne Airport (and the surrounding business park) is a key employment hub in the north, with over 20,000 employees. Existing public transport services do not meet the needs of shift workers, as many businesses operate 24/7. Public transport improvements are urgently required to improve employee access.

Our main employment precincts require better connectivity to and within to ensure that residents have public transport access to jobs, education and health services. This is particularly relevant and immediate for our outer suburban communities, which do not have the transport infrastructure needed for this access.

As a priority, we also need to make sure that bus timetables align with our local train services, alleviating the need for car travel and improving service delivery.

[See: *Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks*](#)

Upfield rail duplication and extension

An absolute priority for our region is improvements on the Upfield rail line. The current Upfield Line services the growing populations of Merri-bek and southern Hume, ending at Upfield Station. But north of there are Melbourne's booming northern suburbs, which stretch across Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell.

The Upfield Line has one of the least frequent peak period services in Melbourne's rail network and is plagued by delays and cancellations. Duplicating the section between Gowrie and Upfield Stations will remove significant bottlenecks and improve frequency for passengers.

Further north, many residents in our growth communities in Mitchell, Whittlesea and Hume are currently only serviced by diesel V/Line services, which are nearing capacity earlier than predicted. Connecting the Upfield Line to the Craigieburn Line will allow full utilisation of the Upfield tracks, becoming the major corridor for suburban services for Wallan and reducing car ownership in the Northern Growth Corridor.

The significant residential, commercial and cultural development areas of Beveridge and Cloverton also lack train stations. Construction of a station at Beveridge will provide public transport to this emerging community, as will a station at our future city of Cloverton, which is anticipated to become one of Melbourne's most significant retail, commercial, employment and service precincts.

See: [Upfield Line improvements fact sheet](#)

Active transport

A key opportunity identified in our transport research is the role that a comprehensive active transport network – including walking, cycling, e-bikes and e-scooters – can play in creating a sustainable transport future. Active transport must be promoted and the right infrastructure provided so that people will be encouraged to walk and cycle rather than drive.

We need engagement and planning to establish a high-quality network of integrated shared trails and active transport networks that will link communities, destinations and a diverse range of urban and natural environments.

Better options would provide desirable, safe and accessible transport and recreation opportunities for our residents, and reinforce the region as a world-class trail destination for visitors. This also underpins the need to preserve our environment and sustainability of transport options.

See: [Northern Trails 2022: a framework for the planning and development of regional trails in Melbourne's north](#)

Electric vehicle transition

We are seeking government support for implementation of recommendations resulting from our evidence-based *Community Electric Vehicle Transition Plan*. This includes financially supporting transition of Council fleet vehicles to electric (with a focus on heavy fleet), and grid connection and grid stability upgrades for Council depots, offices and community facilities.

Our residents are increasingly asking Councils to provide public electric vehicle charging. To meet community requirements a charging network must be developed across our region, with a focus on equality of coverage and availability. The plan indicates that 570 charging points need to be established across our 64 activity centres in the region by 2030. Decisions need to be made about where charging points go, and who pays for and maintains them.

Local government can lead the way in terms of electric vehicle adoption by moving Council fleets to electric vehicles if the transition is supported by government funding, particularly for heavy fleet.

See: [Community Electric Vehicle Transition Plan](#)

Need for an Outer Northern Hospital

Melbourne's north urgently requires a new public hospital to cater for the growing population and increasing health needs in our community, providing emergency care with provision for specialist services such as obstetrics, dialysis, oncology, maternal, neonatal and paediatric services.

The only two public hospitals within the north (Northern Hospital in Epping and Austin/Mercy in Heidelberg) are at capacity. The Northern Hospital in particular is undergoing significant pressure from the continued population growth and demand in the outer northern area. Currently, it has the busiest hospital emergency department in Victoria. A new major public hospital is required in the short term to address current and future high demand. Importantly, there is no dedicated trauma support in the north and expanded service provision in this area is also urgently required.

A new hospital in the north will also attract commercial investments – in allied services, health, education and training, and related businesses. It will contribute significantly to the local economy in an area of high growth, and provide a significant number of jobs, both during construction and in ongoing roles across a range of employment categories.

A firm commitment from federal and state governments is urgently required to ensure there is provision of land for the construction of the hospital.

See: [Outer North Hospital fact sheet](#)

More information

We are always ready to provide more information on our region and our research.

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