

Urban Design Forum Australia



Response to Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy



Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Land Use Plan

Our recommendations for Plan for Victoria

Our submission from August 2024, which is relevant to Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy

Urban Design Forum Australia
Prioritising spatial planning and good urban design for a liveable Victoria at 10 million

Plan for Victoria submission



August 2024

1. Affordable Housing and Choice

1.1

Normalise inclusionary housing requirements across Victoria

1.2

Establish a settlement strategy for Victoria

1.3

Empower communities to welcome the homes they need in their neighbourhoods

2. Equity and jobs

2.1

Mobility transition targets and strategies that are specific to urban and regional needs

2.2

Link density to transport accessibility and investment in transport

2.3

Focus on 'second cities' as hubs for employment and education

3. Thriving and liveable suburbs and towns

3.1

Create an integrated policy to deliver Good Design in Victoria

3.2

Coordinate place-based urban intensification

3.3

Transform remaining greenfield land into compact, walkable communities

4. Sustainable environments and climate action

4.1

Lead the transition to decarbonise the construction sector

4.2

Ensure communities benefit from the transition to renewable energy

4.3

Undertake regional landscape strategies to connect fragmented green spaces

5. Implementation

5.1

Introduce spatial visions and plans

5.2

Expand use of the Digital Twin to support better decision making

5.3

Create greater certainty in planning controls

5.4

Ensure rigorous analysis and design testing when developing planning frameworks

5.5

Establish governance structures that support government collaboration and community participation

5.6

Introduce targets, monitoring and review processes



Introduction

Who are we?

Urban Design Forum Australia is an independent non-profit industry organisation that supports public interest outcomes in cities. We believe that well-designed and effectively governed cities are essential to solving the major challenges of our time. Our members come from private consultancy, state and local government, the development industry and academia.

Our particular strength as a community of built environment professionals is the ability to translate policy concepts into spatial and project design consequences at a range of scales. As practitioners our work regularly involves a feedback loop between policy ambition, design testing, scenario mapping and refinement as we project and explore both the intended and unintended consequences of policy.

We understand the importance of this given that the physical attributes of the built environment directly impacts the livability of our cities and regions, and in turn the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our communities.

Advocacy in a time of planning reform

Urban Design Forum has been actively engaged with the Victorian Government over the past 18 months, to provide impartial, expert advice regarding the current suite of planning reforms.

Of greatest relevance to Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy, is our submission to Plan for Victoria, from August 2024. In this submission we set forward a number of recommendations which highlighted the value of spatial planning and strategic urban design in holistically considering the threats and opportunities we will face, and drew on best practice for concrete recommendations. Our submission specifically highlighted the importance of governance and implementation in the success of such a plan. These themes have informed our submission to the draft 30-year infrastructure strategy.

Urban Design Forum's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy submission

We commend Infrastructure Victoria on the draft 30-year infrastructure strategy submission. We support the 6 objectives that guide and structure the draft strategy, given their consideration of liveability, productivity, focus on the national environment, resilience to climate changes, respect for Aboriginal self-determination.

We particularly value how the draft infrastructure strategy attempts to spatially test specific infrastructure initiatives, and how they connect to and support recent planning reform.

Our response, aside from this introduction is in two parts. The first responds to specific recommendations from the strategy that relate to our advocacy and give specific recommendations on how they could be strengthened. The second focuses on our submission of further recommendations for inclusion in the strategy, primarily relating to coordination and implementation of initiatives.

1. Introduction
 - What the draft 30-year infrastructure strategy does well
2. How the recommendations could be strengthened
 - Build more social housing
 - Mandate more affordable homes near existing infrastructure
 - Rezone locations near existing infrastructure for more home choices
 - Better use government land for open space and greenery
3. What else should be prioritised?
 - Develop spatial plans to enhance coordination of initiatives
 - Introduce metropolitan and regional governance entities to coordinate planning and infrastructure priorities
 - Enable place-based neighbourhood transformation informed by community voices

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the draft strategy. We are available to any questions regarding this submission and welcome the opportunity for future engagement and collaboration.



What the draft 30-year infrastructure strategy does well

As the strategy outlines, infrastructure shapes the daily lives of all Victorians and will be essential to building a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Victoria. It is promising to see the strategy has considered the spectrum of infrastructure, its significance and recommendations for its future. The strategy has been centred on the benefits of a compact well-served city.

The strategy takes a holistic approach aligning the increase of housing supply with infrastructure, the economy, climate resilience and the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples. We value the strong evidence-based approach of Infrastructure Victoria in developing this strategy.

Housing is a priority issue for Victoria Government and we support the strategy's intent of concurrently

delivering the essential infrastructure that is required to support the people that will live in these homes. The national housing crisis has led to rushed planning reform across Australia with a focus on increasing supply of market housing. The strategy goes beyond planning reform and considers mechanisms to mandate affordable housing, which is something the planning system has proved unable to systematically implement in any consistent way.

We support the strategy's use of spatial testing of key initiatives, such as the extension of tram lines and how they relate to announced planning changes such as the Activity Centre Program. Such testing helps better understand implications of concurrent initiatives.



Image (left): Balfe Park in Brunswick shows the importance of delivering high quality housing close to new and improved open space infrastructure.

Image (above): Infrastructure Victoria's strategy objectives.

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How the recommendations could be strengthened



Context

We broadly support the recommendations set forth in the draft strategy, and have highlighted four recommendations of particular importance, that we believe can be strengthened further. Our recommendations are supported with local and international best practice examples.

Image: The Paris Olympic Village committed to ambitious targets across embodied carbon reduction, circularity of material use and mobility transition.

Recommendation 1

Build more social housing

Future Option

Mandate more affordable homes near existing infrastructure



What is the context?

We commend Infrastructure Victoria for prioritising the delivery of more well-located social and affordable housing, through direct investment in 4000 social housing homes a year over 15 years. A strong and sustained commitment to building social housing is required to support Victorians experiencing homelessness and financial hardship.

Where are the gaps?

While government delivery of social housing is a core part of any housing delivery program, the current recommendations do not provide guidance on how this will be delivered on government land, and relies on government delivery alone. The future option 'mandate more affordable homes near existing infrastructure' is commendable, but private sector delivery of affordable housing needs to be mandated now, rather than in the future.

Our recommendation

Set minimum standards for the percentage of social and affordable housing on government land. Ensure public land stays in public hands, through prioritising Ground Lease Models rather than sale of public land. Bring forward mandating private sector delivery of affordable housing through inclusionary zoning or floor area uplift mechanisms.

Image: Section 106 Agreements & Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing in London enable affordable housing through the planning system in London.

Recommendation 7

Rezone locations near existing infrastructure for more home choices



What is the context?

We support the rezoning of areas close to public transport to support well-located housing and compact city. Facilitating the development of more housing near existing and planned infrastructure is key to meeting housing needs. This recommendation is currently underway in the form of the Suburban Rail Loop Precinct Structure Plans, and the Activity Centre Program.

Where are the gaps?

Housing alone does not create a liveable environment. The current Activity Centre Program lacks the place-based planning to identify and deliver open space, public realm upgrades and community infrastructure. The current controls are agnostic to use, focused on market housing not employment and retail. The current 'deemed-to-comply' built form envelopes do not create certainty in yield and a lack of urban design guidelines could lead to poor built form outcomes.

Our recommendation

Ensure rezoning processes include up-front, place specific planning to include what makes places liveable and unique. Refer 'Recommendation C: Enable place-based neighbourhood transformation informed by community voices' in this document. Introduce Floor Area Ratio (FAR) controls and Activity Centre Urban Design Guidelines to create more certainty and high quality built form outcomes.

Image: Central Melbourne employs both FAR controls and the Central Melbourne Design Guide to ensure high quality built form outcomes.

Recommendation 26

Better use government land for open space and greenery



What is the context?

We commend Infrastructure Victoria's prioritisation of open space on government land, including 30% canopy cover targets. High-quality public open space not only provides increased public amenity but also contributes to achieving a climate-resilient Victoria. A commitment to the increase and improvement of public open space recognises the responsibility the government has as the operators of these areas.

Where are the gaps?

While focusing on government land for the delivery of open space is important, further guidance is required for where and how this will be delivered. Equally, further emphasis should be placed on acquisition of land for more open space in intensifying urban areas. While a 30% canopy cover target on government land is commendable, we will not reach overall greening targets by relying on government land alone.

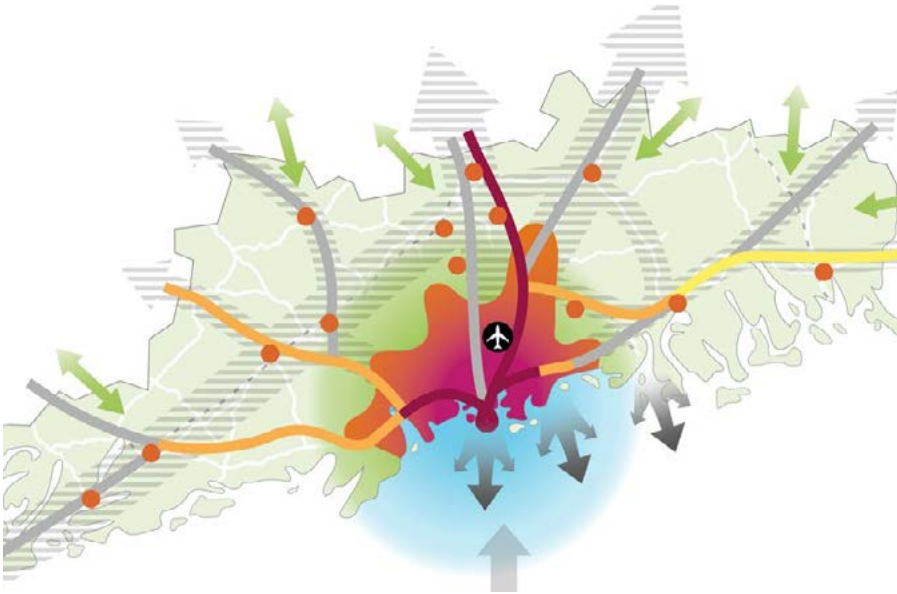
Our recommendation

Prepare metropolitan and regional landscape strategies to co-ordinate these outcomes place by place, encompassing opportunities and strategies across existing public land, new public land acquisitions and private land holdings, creating biodiversity corridors and responding to need. Develop mechanisms for acquiring land for open space in SRL Precincts and Activity Centres.

Image: Guandu Nature Park, Taipei is an example of an ecological corridor and open space asset resulting from a metropolitan strategy to connect a range of habitats together along a waterway.

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What else should be prioritised?



Context

While the draft strategy presents a holistic vision for the future of Victoria, and considers the spatial implications of key initiatives, we recommend that the final plan strengthens the coordination and implementation of the various infrastructure recommendations. Foregrounding the role of spatial planning and strategic urban design has great potential to strengthen the liveability and productivity of Victoria, and our ability to respond to climate shocks.

Image: The Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Land Use Plan is a comprehensive plan with statutory affect and wide ranging buy-in.

Recommendation A

Develop spatial plans to enhance coordination of initiatives



What is the context?

While the Victorian government's Plan for Victoria is an important first step in terms of setting a vision and set of actions for Victoria, it lacks spatial plans that coordinate and guide the implementation of these initiatives. However, without spatial plans for each region, we risk fully understanding the identity, opportunities and challenges of each place. We risk being left with a series of disjointed transport and planning changes that do not transform Victoria in line with our collective ambitions.

What idea could address this?

Introduce clear, compelling, spatial plans for metropolitan Melbourne and each region of Victoria. Each plan will be informed by community and industry to determine the unique identity, opportunities and challenges of each place. It will bring together planned transport and planning reforms to into a cohesive spatial vision, ensuring alignment with policy objectives and prioritisation of catalysing projects. Spatial analysis and iterative design testing will ensure that the proposals respond to climate risks and create liveable and productive regions.

Where is this done well?

Greater Sydney is well on the way to becoming a multi-centred metropolis, with significant planning and investment focus to consolidate activities in Parramatta and Western Sydney Parklands, to better serve the metropolis and reduce pressure on Sydney CBD. This is thanks to a clear, widely understood spatial vision, led by the Greater Sydney Commission.

Image: The Greater Sydney Region Plan: A Metropolis of Three Cities establishes a clear vision for three distinct urban centres.

Recommendation B

Introduce metropolitan and regional governance entities to coordinate planning and infrastructure priorities



What is the context?

Any plan is only as good as the governance structures in place to deliver it. Victoria faces governance challenges in planning due to fragmented responsibilities between local and state governments, leading to unclear roles and poor communication. This results in siloed operations and reduced accountability. Additionally, the lack of a unified metropolitan voice and insufficient system stewardship further complicate effective planning and implementation.

What idea could address this?

Establish metropolitan and regional planning authorities, with a state-local democratic mandate, and plan-making and infrastructure coordination abilities, in order to better support strategic, spatial planning and implementation of strategic plans. These entities would support government collaboration and community participation. For more information, refer to Municipal Association of Victoria's 'Shaping metropolitan Melbourne' from December 2023.

Where is this done well?

Greater London Authority (GLA) is responsible for developing and implementing the London Plan, which outlines the vision for London's growth over the next 20-25 years, addressing key areas such as housing, transportation, economic development, and environmental sustainability. The GLA ensures that development across the city is coordinated and aligned with broader strategic goals, promoting sustainable and inclusive growth.

Image: Greater London Authority are custodians of the London Plan.

Recommendation C

Enable place-based neighbourhood transformation informed by community voices



What is the context?

While the Activity Centre Program is commendable for its aims of supporting more people to live close to public transport and amenity, and for speeding up the planning amendment process, the program is rushed, and risks not delivering liveable places. The current process is focused narrowly on building envelopes for development, considering the unique purpose of each place, the quality of new development or required infrastructure such as public realm upgrades, open space, schools and community hubs.

What idea could address this?

Augment the current Activity Centre Program to introduce a 'structure-plan lite' process that introduces spatial planning and strategic urban design while remaining a replicable model. First, understand the specifics of each place through engagement, spatial analysis and land use projections. Then develop spatial options that determine the locations of public infrastructure and private development, and get community feedback on these options. Finally, develop mechanism to deliver public infrastructure.

Where is this done well?

In response to the NSW government's TOD Program, Ku Ring Gai Council developed three spatial options for the future of Gordon, Killara, Roseville and Lindfield, that met the objectives of the Program while being place responsive. Community members were given two weeks to give feedback on their preferred option which has been endorsed.

Image: Ku Ring Gai Council's TOD Program response highlights the potential for rapid, place-based precinct planning.

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