



NATIONAL Growth Areas ALLIANCE

Response to Infrastructure Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy February 2021



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Response to Infrastructure Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy

Overview

Five million people live in an outer metropolitan growth area around our major cities – that's 20% of Australia's population in just 6% of local government areas.

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) represents Councils from these fast-growing areas whose populations have been growing at a pace double the national average.

NGAA members have a shared vision of growing communities that are resilient, liveable and thriving. However, this vision is unachievable until investment in vital infrastructure and services matches the size of the growth areas population.

Our Victorian members are:

- Cardinia Shire Council
- City of Casey
- City of Whittlesea
- City of Wyndham
- City of Melton
- City of Hume and
- Mitchell Shire Council.

Population growth rates in NGAA municipalities have been consistently higher than capital city averages and higher than predicted in state planning documents. Despite the temporary cessation of overseas migration due to COVID-19, population growth will continue in growth areas due to stimulus of the residential construction sector through the HomeBuilder program which is now extended.

Top 10 Local Government Areas in Victoria for Homebuilder applications

1. Wyndham – 2088 applications
2. Casey – 1672 applications
3. Greater Geelong – 1656 applications
4. Melton – 1619 applications
5. Hume – 1593 applications
6. Whittlesea – 976 applications
7. Greater Bendigo – 847 applications
8. Ballarat – 786 applications
9. Cardinia – 538 applications
10. Bass Coast – 521 applications

Source: Mawbey, Nathan, HomeBuilder: Regional Victoria, Wyndham big winners from grants, Herald Sun, 25/01/2021

Increases in building approvals and planning advice requests in NGAA Member councils across the country in 2020 show the ongoing residential development, investment and demand. They are evidence of the continuing population pressure on growth areas post-pandemic.

In Victoria's growth areas, building permits for dwellings in 2020 are up – as an example, they have increased by 20% on 2019 numbers at Wyndham City Council. This is nearly

double the state-wide trend of an 11% increase in domestic building permits for the same period.

Combined with fast-tracked and streamlined planning processes approved by State Governments in response to COVID-19, there is an extremely high risk of perpetuating rapid greenfield development without sufficient planning, infrastructure and service-delivery for new communities.

Summary of Metropolitan Fringe Growth Areas, 2014-2019, Victoria

LGA Name	2014 population	2019 population	Avg. annual % growth (2014-2019)	Avg. annual population growth (2014-2019)
Cardinia (S)	88,070	112,159	5.0%	4,818
Casey (C)	287,937	353,872	4.2%	13,187
Hume (C)	191,278	233,471	4.1%	8,439
Melton (C)	129,309	164,895	5.0%	7,117
Mitchell (S)	39,084	46,082	3.3%	1,400
Whittlesea (C)	187,899	230,238	4.1%	8,468
Wyndham (C)	201,512	270,487	6.1%	13,795
Total	1,125,089	1,411,204	4.54% avg	57,224

Source: .id the population experts, State of Australia's Fast Growing Outer Urban Areas, 2020

Summary of Metropolitan Fringe Growth Areas, 2021-2031, Victoria

LGA Name	2021 population	2031 population	Avg. annual % growth (2021-2031)	Avg. annual population growth (2021-2031)
Cardinia (S)	122,700	163,331	2.9%	4,063
Casey (C)	377,524	481,318	2.5%	10,379
Hume (C)	250,522	316,240	2.4%	6,572
Melton (C)	179,489	276,428	4.4%	9,694
Mitchell (S)	50,071	78,766	4.6%	2,869
Whittlesea (C)	246,011	327,471	2.9%	8,146
Wyndham (C)	298,150	406,651	3.2%	10,850
Total	1,524,467	2,050,205	3.27%	52,573

Source: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victorian State Government, 2019.

COVID-19 has impacted heavily on growth area communities

Victorian growth areas communities and economies have been heavily impacted by COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdowns and economic downturn.

Outer urban areas were COVID-19 hotspots, due to a range of reasons including insecure and casualised work. The City of Wyndham in Melbourne's west had the most COVID-19 cases of any LGA in Australia, with more than 2,200 people infected. Other Victorian growth areas recorded the next-worst infection numbers nation-wide, including Hume (1660), Whittlesea (1218) and Melton (1159). These figures do not account for the most recent outbreak and subsequent five-day lockdown.

Together, Victoria's growth area LGAs account for nearly half of all COVID-19 cases in the state.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing disadvantage in outer urban communities. Prior to the pandemic, growth area communities already experienced significant mortgage and rental stress. Mental health services were already under-resourced or non-existent in many growth areas, and jobs for young people scarce. Infrastructure that enables services to be delivered to these communities is fundamental. Without an ongoing, long-term, focused infrastructure investment in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, we risk entrenching the inequities already experienced by these communities.

The NGAA notes the comment in the Draft Strategy that the pause in migration is an opportunity to reset the approach to infrastructure (p.179). NGAA agrees with this intention but notes that demand for housing has not dropped across all growth areas. NGAA Councils report demand for subdivision permits and other planning-related development activity has increased, not decreased, and they see no material drop in housing demand in the short, medium or long term in growth areas as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Infrastructure demand in Melbourne's growth areas is long term

Councils where growth has been occurring for many years, such as the City of Casey in the south-east, face a backlog of infrastructure projects. On top of the backlog, the newer growth fronts in the outer south east, the north and the west of Melbourne will continue to grow for decades.

Urban development is now moving into deeply rural areas which are unserviced and have no basic road network. This is why infrastructure is expensive in these areas. The NGAA on behalf of its members strongly rejects any suggestion that government should rethink the value of the investment required into growth areas compared to existing urban areas.

The Infrastructure Victoria Draft Strategy notes that, compared to new infrastructure in growth areas, it is more cost effective for development to be more concentrated where infrastructure already exists (need to reference this). This is not disputed. Melbourne needs to house increased population throughout the whole metropolitan area, and increased densities in existing suburbs need to be realised.

However, the NGAA is extremely concerned that density aspirations and demand on middle and inner ring infrastructure not be used as a reason by governments to reduce funding directed to growth areas.

Infrastructure demand in growth areas exists currently. Successive Victorian governments have determined to expand Melbourne's urban boundary and create the growth areas, and

these decisions have built in decades of large-scale infrastructure and service demands, such as roads, transport and social infrastructure.

It is incumbent on governments to fulfil obligations arising from the decision to expand Melbourne by supporting the people who live and work in these areas, and by ensuring that services and infrastructure are delivered in a timely manner. The decision to expand the UGB cannot be 'undone' because of the high cost of new infrastructure in greenfields areas.

Investment in Growth areas is an economic opportunity

Even with these challenges, growth areas have a leading role to play in economic recovery. NGAA is encourage all levels of government to 'reimagine' our suburban cities, in particular growth areas. COVID-19 prompted a significant spatial redistribution of location of employment, with vast numbers of people working productively at home for short or longer periods of time, dependent on state restrictions. This localised work model is now proven to work and could be equally applied to the delivery of skills training, higher education and business support – all key elements of outer urban economic recovery.

NGAA has long called for a rebalancing of Australian cities, where jobs, infrastructure and services are equally accessible to the 5 million people who live in outer urban areas. We have a once in a generation opportunity to build on this momentum and shape outer urban development models to the '20 or 30-minute city' model. COVID-19 has kick-started this process.

A sizeable shift to working from home has not only reduced congestion but has also improved the lives of commuters and their families. At the same time, the inadequacy of parks, walking and bike trails, community and recreational facilities in new suburbs has become all too evident.

Victoria lacks place-based infrastructure planning and delivery which results in poor outcomes

NGAA notes the reference to the Greater Sydney Commission and the Place-based Infrastructure compacts (p179) in NSW. Growth area councils in Melbourne experience continual challenges with state agencies on their lack of engagement with Councils. Regular and early consultation by state agencies, especially DHHS and the Victorina School Building Authority, would support information exchange and lead to better development outcomes.

Councils can provide useful information to state agencies such as the progress of development fronts and the timing of permits (at a high level) which would support a more considered approach by agencies to preplanning and sequencing delivery of infrastructure. It would also enable efficiencies to be identified, such as co-location opportunities.

The VPA plans for community facilities to be located around activity centres, but delivery is still undertaken by state agencies in a way that is not 'place-sensitive'. Growth area Councils are experienced at delivery sports grounds and community facilities such as Maternal Child health, Kindergartens and Community Hubs.

NGAA Response to specific sections and recommendations

Section 1.4 Stay connected to global markets

Rec 27. Construct an outer metropolitan road and rail corridor.

Support – this infrastructure will support jobs, economic development and movement of population in some of Melbourne's growth areas

Section 2.1 Integrate land use and infrastructure planning.

Strongly support all recommendations. The recommendations should be focused on *collaborating at infrastructure pre-planning and planning stage and coordinating at infrastructure delivery stage.*

Growth Area Councils continually face a battle with state agencies to engage with them, to properly plan for and sequence the delivery of state infrastructure as development fronts move outwards, and population moves into new estates. Growth Area Councils also face the same challenge as middle ring and inner councils around the lack of capacity to levy development contributions to upgrade infrastructure e.g. drainage and local roads, where older areas are densifying through subdivision of large semi-rural lots or lot consolidation.

Section 2.2 Create thriving urban places

NGAA supports recommendation 38 to partner with local governments to fund pedestrian infrastructure and recommendation 40 on data collection. Accessible pathways to activity centres and railway stations support walking and help create a built environment that is more inclusive of people with disabilities, children and the elderly.

Data should be considered in terms of accessibility and good urban design outcomes. For example, cycle paths that end abruptly or move onto a road are a poor outcome and do not encourage safe cycling, even though they might meet a criterion of 'provision'.

NGAA suggests that recommendation 41 be considered distinctly in the context of growth areas, and that the recommendations under section 2.3 also be considered in the context of growth areas and poor or non-existent public transport services in many outer suburbs.

Road upgrades of arterial roads are occurring (e.g. Thompsons Road in Melbourne's southeast), that do not allow for Smart Bus lanes within the road corridor. This means bus routes become trapped in congestion as the road fills with private vehicles and offer no meaningful benefit as an alternate mode of transport.

Behaviour change must be incentivised through dedicated bus lanes on arterial roads. Pricing needs to reflect the objective of encouraging people to choose a bus over a private vehicle. The aim must be to push patronage numbers up so that more direct fast routes can be brought online (to train stations and activity centres for example) that are financially viable, and indirect routes can continue to operate for those for whom commuting to work is not the reason for catching a bus, such as young people, elderly, people with a disability.

All residents across greater metropolitan Melbourne have a right to expect reasonable access to public transport.

Section 3.1 Shape the transport network for better access

NGAA supports all these recommendations as infrastructure that improves the overall performance of the transport network benefits residents and workers of growth areas, many

of who commute long distances across the metropolitan area to access services and employment.

Section 3.2 Plan for growth areas

The NGAA strongly supports all recommendations as they will improve transport options and liveability for growth area communities.

Section 3.3 Align social infrastructure with better service delivery

The NGAA strongly supports all recommendations.

Recommendation 73

Targets should include growth areas. Social housing sites should be identified early in the land use planning process and given how much of the population is moving into the areas, including people who cannot afford rent in more expensive suburbs. The model of estate development does not easily support government entering the market to purchase land sites off developers. The mechanism for delivery of social housing in growth areas needs to be planned for by the Victorian Planning Authority so land budgets can be calculated that account for future social housing provision, even if delivery is down the track.

Recommendation 74

Strongly support. There is a chronic underservicing of hospital, specialist and allied services across all growth areas including the south east. Councils advise the NGAA that DHHS has a poor record of working with councils to understand and plan for demand in growth areas, and manage site specific issues, such as parking, in a hospital precinct.

Services such as residential drug rehabilitation are generally not located close to family support in the growth area (evidence?)

Recommendation 75

NGAA strongly supports this recommendation and encourages Infrastructure Victoria to note the distinct and chronic lack of mental health services in growth areas. Where services exist, there are lengthy delays to access them, and they can be in located in areas not convenient to public transport. For example, Narre Warren HeadSpace is located in a business park with no public transport access.