30 August, 2024

Plan Victoria – 2050

POSITION PAPER

By 2051, State Government estimates Victoria will be home to over 10 million people. The New Plan for Victoria projects 80-85% of the state's population will live in Melbourne. That puts Melbourne's population at approximately 8-8.5m; the current size of London.

Our submission focuses on the ambition for a truly great Victorian community, one that is fair, equitable, celebrates its diverse people, landscape, economies and is a highly desirable place to live and work. The Plan states it is for All Victorians, yet our view is it lacks ambition for Ballarat, our region and regional Victoria more broadly.

We challenge the assertion that sees Melbourne as "*inclusive, liveable, sustainable, prosperous and enriching"* whilst being home to 80+% of our state's population.

The engagement to date has identified eight big ideas, but the Plan does not challenge the fundamental question of the state's overall population distribution. Rather, it articulates a presumption that we are on a pathway to Melbourne with a population at 8.5m. Such a presumption does not give due credit to the role regional Victoria can play in our overall economic, social and environmental prosperity.

The Hon. Sonia Kilkenny's vision for "*the kind of Victoria we want: happy and healthy, connected, affordable, sustainable, thriving, liveable and fair"* (December 2023), seems hard to imagine with such population centralisation in our capital City.

This submission proposes that, to achieve the Vision for Victoria as articulated, a re-think of the state's population distribution is required, with more focus on the opportunities for the whole state, including regional and rural.

Such a re-think must consider a Vision for the state that provides and invests for a greater proportion of the state's population living in larger, well connected, fully resourced and serviced regional cities and towns.

This submission asks what could Victoria look like with a more equitable balance of population distribution?

Could Melbourne be the thriving and vibrant metropolitan capital city with 60-70% of the state's population, rather than the 80%+ as is currently proposed?

Could regional cities and towns and rural areas deliver more to the State's Vision, if they were home to 30-40% of the state's population, rather than the 20% or less that is currently proposed?

Committee for Ballarat asserts the New Plan for Victoria should not accept Melbourne is on the path to being a 'megacity' if it wants to stay true to its vision for a happy and healthy, connected, affordable, sustainable, thriving, liveable and fair community. Rather, we call for a more equitable balance in the state's population for metropolitan, regional and rural living.

As the mainland state with Australia's smallest geographical footprint and a population of over 10m by 2050, Victoria has an opportunity to disperse population more broadly. To do so will minimise the challenges in servicing the demands of a megacity and maximise opportunities for regional Victoria, creating a more sustainable, liveable and vibrant 'whole of state' for all Victorians.

A Long-Term Vision is Welcomed

Committee for Ballarat advocates for long-term, big picture thinking and we commend the Department of Transport and Planning for engaging Victorians in a state-wide plan, focused on the next 30 years.

Committee for Ballarat's submission proposes that whilst we have experienced better than expected growth, especially since 2020, we have capacity to grow more ambitiously than is projected. We propose a more equitable balance in the growth projections for metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.

Our Growing Population

Plan for Victoria's population growth projections:

	2021	2051	Increase
Victoria	6.5 m	10.3 m	3.8 m
Metro Melbourne	4.9 m	8.0 m	3.1 m
Regional Victoria	1.6 m	2.3 m	700 k

Victoria's Housing Statement projects the number of dwellings as follows:

	2021	2051	Increase
Combined Melbourne	**2.130m**	**3.970 m**	**1.84m**
Established Melbourne	*1.8 m*	*3.2 m*	*1.4 m*
Melb Growth Areas	*330k*	*770 k*	*440 k)*
Regional Victoria	**800 k**	**1.225 m**	**425 k**

Key to our Submission

- A 2050 vision for the state's population should see a combination of a sustainable, thriving and vibrant capital city with well-connected larger regional cities, regional towns and rural communities
- Regional Victoria can carry more of the projected population growth than is outlined in the Plan with the infrastructure and services that create the great communities we want
- As a megacity, Melbourne will face increasing challenges that come with unsustainable growth. These include housing, services, jobs, infrastructure, transport, social cohesion and connection
- It is time we considered the path we are on and assess what the Plan for Victoria could be with a population plan that incorporates greater regionalisation and achieves a better balance for all Victorians.

Housing affordability and choice

Since 2020, Ballarat's growth has averaged 1.88% pa and regional Victoria's average is 1.31%; both are above the Victorian average at 1.2%.

Regional Victoria has seen a surge in 'city-dwellers' moving away from Melbourne, in part due to the affordability of housing and the lifestyle and community choices on offer.

For many, the appeal of urban living and a city lifestyle have become difficult to access in Melbourne due to the spreading nature of the city and the difficulties of commuting from the suburbs to the activities of the central business and entertainment districts.

The Regional Australia Institute's Regional Movers Index (RMI) publication focuses on migration from capital cities to regions and between capital cities and regions. The RMI publication focuses on net migration and gives updated quarterly information on the extent regions are either growing or shrinking.

In the twelve months to March 2024, more people headed to the regions in Victoria than to Melbourne. These quarterly numbers are back to the levels of migration we experienced through 2020 and 2021 during the height of the COVID period.

For Victoria, 30% of the net outflows that vacated Melbourne settled in the regions. The Shire of Moorabool captured 5.4% of the total inflows to regional Victoria and Greater Geelong captured a further 4.6%. Both LGAs feature in the Top Five LGAs in the country for inflow migration. Ballarat has featured in the Top Ten LGAs nationally every quarter since 2020.

These numbers suggest a strong demand for regional living and housing affordability, and choice features heavily in people's motivations to move. The top five factors driving people's choice to move to the regions are:

- Avoiding roads and traffic congestion
- Reducing general stress and anxiety
- Reduced cost of living, including housing affordability – mortgage repayments
- An abundance of jobs
- A sense of space and connection to nature.

Housing availability, diversity and supply for home-owners and renters alike is having enormous impact on housing affordability for all. From the onset of COVID to April 2024, the median dwelling value across regional Victoria had increased by 34.4% to $570,153. This compares to Melbourne with an increase of 11.0% to $783,262. (Bendigo Bank, June 2024)

The shortage of regional housing is constraining regional growth and development, preventing regions from reaching their full potential. Growth in housing and all associated infrastructure will enable growth in regional areas, increase housing supply and choice for those we know are moving and, importantly, ease population pressure on Melbourne.

Equity and jobs

Growth in regional areas will also be enhanced by further public and private investment in business and industry that will create more jobs and attract more people.

The awarding of government contracts, incentives for business to expand and / or establish their operations and the reduction in red tape for commercial and industrial development will stimulate growth in regional areas and help ease population pressures in Melbourne.

In the period 2016 – 2022, Ballarat's job growth has been 17.8%, with 80% of all workers in Ballarat living in the area. Growth in the average number of businesses in the three years 2021 – 2023 is 5.7%, with a peak in in 2022 of 9.8%.

Both the jobs and business growth numbers demonstrate Ballarat continues to attract investment and people. These numbers reinforce the contention that regional cities such as Ballarat can play an increasingly important role in the state's growth trajectory and narrative.

The regions have much to offer in relation to the vision for Victoria as a *happy and healthy, connected, affordable, sustainable, thriving, liveable and fair* place to live. Ballarat is a city that is the capital of Western Victoria. As a hub for the region, it can provide the jobs, services and community to create a diverse and thriving centre with opportunity for many who would otherwise be forced to live or commute to Melbourne.

Thriving and liveable suburbs and towns

The pathway this paper proposes is for our state to have a greater proportion of the population living in larger, well connected, fully resourced and serviced regional cities and towns.

Ballarat as a thriving and liveable regional city, serviced appropriately with the necessary social and physical infrastructure, delivers diversity the Plan for Victoria seeks to achieve in communities and neighbourhoods. Larger regional cities have capacity to further enhance their distinctiveness and the local characteristics that make them unique places to live and work.

Thriving and liveable suburbs in Melbourne are more likely to be achieved where population pressure is less substantive and, again, makes the case for a more equitable balance of population distribution across the state.

The Plan also calls for better coordination of new development with delivery of infrastructure. This is more difficult to achieve in metropolitan suburban areas where the concentration of population is so great that development of all infrastructure is hampered by, and often at the expense of, public amenity, open space, biodiversity and the many elements that feature in thriving and liveable suburbs.

Sustainable environments and climate action

Megacities, the size Melbourne is projected to be in 2050, do not deliver sustainable outcomes, nor can they mitigate effectively the impacts of climate change.

According to June 2023 report, Melbourne in 2050 will face an average of 16 extreme heat events each year. Such events are likely to result in economic losses of 1.4 – 1.7% of GDP per year. (Charlie Siggs: *From data to action, tackling urban heat islands in Melbourne*. Constellr.com)

Average temperatures in large cities are higher than in regional and rural areas as urban areas trap more heat with hard, sealed surfaces and a lack of vegetation or 'green infrastructure'. Known as Urban Heat Islands, these are more likely in more heavily densely populated.

If we want a more sustainable environment for Victoria, where the impacts of climate change are less severe, we need a population plan that sees a more equitable balance of population living in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

A collaborative voice - Committee for Ballarat members:

Committee for Ballarat's Purpose is to inspire thought leadership and drive collaboration to shape a prosperous region. Our vision for Ballarat and the region is for a thriving and vibrant region, recognised for its liveability, sustainability and inclusiveness.

We are a member organisation with representation across every sector of our regional economy. We focus on long-term, strategic issues that enhance the city and region's prosperity and advocate for sustainable and responsible development. We do so in collaboration with our members, key stakeholders and the three tiers of Government in a bi-partisan way.

This submission has been drafted following extensive consultation with our members, various engagement with state government and insights from industry experts regarding population trends, connectivity, liveability and social cohesion.

A list of all our members is attached. I sign on behalf of our members

Michael Poulton
CEO

committee for ballarat
thinking ahead

Members

Committee for Ballarat members are business and community leaders drawn from every sector of the regional economy

Adroit Insurance Group
Alstom
Australian Catholic University
Ballarat Cemeteries
Ballarat Clarendon College
Ballarat Foundation United Way Inc
Ballarat Gold Mine
Ballarat Grammar
Ballarat Hospice Care Inc
Ballarat Multicultural Council
Ballarat Tech School
BGT Jobs & Training
BJT Legal
C E Bartlett Pty Ltd
CAFS
CDC Ballarat Pty Ltd
Colliers International
Commonwealth Bank
Count Pro
Eureka Concrete
Federation TAFE
Ferndale Foods
Field Air
Findlay Engineering
Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute
Gekko Systems Pty Ltd
gforce employment + recruitment
Golden Plains Shire Council
Green Eco Technologies
Heinz Law
Hepburn Shire Council
ICN
Inspire HQ
Integra Land Pty Ltd
JK Personnel
Lake Imaging
Loreto College
Luv-A-Duck
MaxiTRANS Operations Pty Ltd
McCallum Disability Services
Morton +Co Architects
Motus Australia
Mulcahy & Co Accounting Services
Nicholson Construction
Phoenix P12 Community College
Pinarc Disability Support Inc
Pipe Pro Directional Drilling
Porter Plant
PPT Partners Pty Ltd
Pyrenees Shire Council
Ray White Ballarat
Red Lion Hotel
Royal South Street Society
RSM Australia Pty Ltd
Sectrol Security
Spiire Australia
Sports Central
Springhill Farm Australia
St John of God Hospital
St Patrick's College Ballarat
Telstra
The Courier
The Goods Shed
The Y Ballarat
UFS Dispensaries
UGL Rail
Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
Western Victoria Primary Health Network
Women's Health Grampians

A Leader's Impact
Ballarat Agricultural and Pastoral Society Inc. (BAPS)
Ballarat International Foto Biennale
Flynn - Master Builders
Kaufmann Property Consultants
Milano Partners
Minerals Council of Australia Victorian Division
Geelong Manufacturing Council
Grantus
Hygge Property

Australian Industry Group
Commerce Ballarat
Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry