

**Infrastructure Victoria**  
**Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy**  
**Latrobe City Council Submission**  
**February 2021**



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## Introduction

Latrobe City Council thanks Infrastructure Victoria for the opportunity to make this submission to the Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy.

Latrobe City is one of Victoria's four major Regional Cities and Gippsland's only Regional City, less than two hours from Melbourne. It is home to approximately 75,000 people; the Gippsland regional population exceeds 260,000 people. Latrobe City is resource rich with abundant forests, rich agricultural land, water resources and large deposits of brown coal. Latrobe City is home to 5,000 businesses and currently around 32,000 jobs. Its Gross Regional Product (GRP) is over \$5.6 billion per annum.

Latrobe City is known for its excellence in engineering capability, public administration, education and health care - and as a cultural and commercial centre for Gippsland. It is also home to a highly skilled and diverse workforce.

Latrobe City is ideally placed to embrace emerging new industries and leading-edge innovation to stabilise and grow the region's and Victoria's economy in the midst of energy sector change and the COVID-19 pandemic. These opportunities are driven by the existing strengths and competitive advantages that the region has to offer due its long-standing history as the hub of Victoria's power generation.

The purpose of this document is to provide Latrobe City Council's feedback to Infrastructure Victoria in relation to the draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy.

This document responds to three major sections of the Strategy and the key points highlighted are outlined below:

### Section 1: Confront long-term challenges

Latrobe City Council is focused on supporting the region's energy transition as the means to diversify the local economy and invite investment in alternative technologies and innovation. This can be driven by the existing energy production and distribution industries and infrastructure that can support alternative and new energy technology investments. The newly established Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone is well placed to take advantage of these opportunities, although more information is required on the related planning and potential land-use implications, as well as impacts on residents within these zones.

The Centre of Australian Automotive Futures (CAAF) is highlighted as an innovative project for cutting-edge technologies in mobility, autonomous vehicles and renewable energy that can further position Latrobe City as the alternative energy and innovation hub.



Latrobe City's connectivity to global markets is critical and can be delivered by optimising capacity at the Port of Melbourne and the construction of an outer metropolitan road and rail corridor to bolster our vibrant export sectors. Latrobe City Council has also a keen interest in building Victoria's circular economy through the improved recycling infrastructure for priority materials potentially to be located in Latrobe City.

#### Section 2: Manage urban change

Latrobe City Council suggests that a more integrated infrastructure approach is adopted to support urban change, so as to apply a consistent approach to different sectors. We also concur with the need to adapt infrastructure for modern needs predominantly by expanding the legislated definition of critical infrastructure and improving information flows.

#### Section 4: Develop regional Victoria

Latrobe City Council makes various suggestions for mechanisms to develop regional Victoria and Latrobe City further, e.g. through investing in road and rail freight upgrades for regional areas as well as upgrades to power supplies for agriculture and regional manufacturing. The Council supports the unlocking of regional economic growth opportunities through various projects we are spearheading, such as the Food Manufacturing Precinct.

Furthermore, the Council puts forward suggestions in relation to regional Victorians' health, safety and inclusion. The mechanisms to deliver these positive outcomes could include integrated shared social services, climate adapted facilities, expansion of social housing in regional centres, improved technology and access to libraries, and equitable access to regional residential and post-residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation treatment services, as well as a strong community involvement when community infrastructure is updated, repurposed or retired.

Council is also enquiring why Latrobe City as one of four major Regional Cities is not included in Recommendation 39: Transform cycling in Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong.

The development of this document has been informed by the various Council Departments including:

- Strategic Planning
- Business Development
- Community Health & Wellbeing
- Economic Investment & Transition
- Resource Recovery & Environment
- Libraries & Customer Services
- Events & Tourism & Creative Arts



This feedback responds to the various draft recommendations presented in the 30-year Infrastructure Strategy that are of relevance to Latrobe City's continued growth and development as a Regional City.

## Submission

### **Section 1: Confront long-term challenges**

#### **1.1 Navigate the energy transition**

##### **1. Accelerate the uptake of zero emissions vehicles**

Latrobe City Council is supportive of this recommendation and wants to be at the forefront of the development of advanced automotive technologies, with its proposal to establish the Centre for Australian Automotive Futures (CAAF) to advance a range of advanced automotive technologies, automotive materials and autonomous vehicle technologies.

The intent is to embrace emerging technologies such as renewable energy power (electric and hydrogen) and future technologies such as mobility, autonomous vehicles and materials for automotive equipment and parts into one Centre.

The Centre will encompass research, development and commercialisation activities, delivering education, training and testbed facilities on site for industry and the development community.

Latrobe City Council will look to partner with government, universities, vocational training, research organisations and, importantly, industry and investors. These partners will include national and international organisations.

In this context, Latrobe City Council is also supportive of the recommendations under section 1.3 Embrace Technological Opportunities, particularly 17. Prepare for increasingly automated vehicle fleets.

##### **2. Augment electricity transmission for renewable energy and resilience**

The Infrastructure Victoria's draft strategy states *"electricity transmission infrastructure has historically been configured to carry power from the Latrobe Valley power stations to places with high energy use, like Melbourne. But future large-scale renewable energy will be sourced from places with good sun and wind resources, such as the western region of the state."*





Latrobe City has significant energy production and distribution industries and infrastructure, including an electricity grid with connections to Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. These assets provide Latrobe City with significant opportunities to attract alternative and new energy technology investments, leveraging not only existing infrastructure but the extensive skill base and engineering capabilities of this region. This places Latrobe City at an advantage as an ideal location to generate and transmit large-scale renewable energy, supported by its abundant natural resources. Governments at all levels can capitalise on existing transmission infrastructure by working with local communities on the siting of suitable renewable energy projects in Latrobe City.

### 3. Identify and coordinate priority Renewable Energy Zones

Latrobe City Council welcomes the Government announcement for the establishment of the Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone, however more information is required to be made available on the identification process of these zones and how will they be placed into the planning scheme. We also recommend a process to be implemented that will inform those residents that are located within a renewable energy zone and has protections regarding future land use conflicts in these areas.

We note that the Renewable Energy Zone does not seem to incorporate Latrobe Valley. Therefore, the Council urges the Government to clarify its plan to capitalise on the infrastructure existing in the Valley for transmission.

### 1.2 Respond to the changing climate

Generally speaking, following the establishment of the Biogas Generator and a Micro Grid under Councils' new Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) we are, as a Council, expecting to see 80% of our energy needs being powered from low carbon and renewable energy sources by the end of 2021. Moving forward, we have the opportunity to achieve all our energy needs for running Council assets from clean energy sources over the next two to three years (subject to future grants and other funding being approved) for the expansion of solar and battery assets being integrated.

Planning for climate change and adaption is now mandated within the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Municipal Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. The only mandated section to be included in the new Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) is that the Council's is to have a response to Climate Change and Adaption. In this context, Latrobe City Council believes that the recommended actions appear to be sound. Bushfire risk, water security and major weather events are all relevant to Latrobe City and region.



#### 11. Consider all water supply sources

Latrobe City Council is highly supportive of careful consideration of the impacts on water supply sources, including for mine rehabilitation. This has been expressed by Latrobe City Council in numerous submissions to the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy. The impacts on existing and future uses of utilising available water for filling mine voids should be treated with caution.

#### 1.4 Stay connected to global markets

#### 24. Optimise capacity at the Port of Melbourne

Latrobe City Council is supportive of the inclusion of this recommendation and in our previous submission to Infrastructure Victoria, raised the port capacity issues that relate to the pulp, paper and converted paper product manufacturing in Latrobe City.

These matters included rail freight and related port access to be considered, alongside with road freight infrastructure; and additional items as advocated for previously by Australian Paper:

- Provision within the port to accept regional freight trains up to 1200 meters and flexible stabling;
- Stevedores to provide complete train services including empty container marshalling and loading at a fair market rate;
- The new port infrastructure costs to be collected via an increase to the import tariff only, or alternatively, for this cost to be covered by the Victorian Government.

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

Latrobe City Council would like to see metropolitan train upgrades to align with the upgrade to existing Gippsland line services and infrastructure in support of the region's growth.

Some solutions for the Gippsland line have previously been presented through the Stronger Together report, commissioned by the City of Geelong, which puts forward a case for a 200km/ hour fully electrified community rail program between Melbourne and Latrobe (Traralgon). Similarly, Rail Futures Incorporated (RFI) has developed a 30-year blueprint for rail development in Melbourne called Melbourne Rail Plan 2020-2050 that includes a South-East Fastline (SEFL) as a solution for the Gippsland line.

These programs, however, are estimated to require significant net investment over a timeframe of 17+ years. Therefore, shorter-term interim solutions are required and need to be planned for.



The Federal Government has committed to funding a \$8M faster rail business case for the Melbourne to Traralgon rail corridor. This could include investigations into an interim solution to support investment in short-term delivery of improvements in service reliability and journey time reductions on the Gippsland line. Some options could include the completion of Caulfield-Dandenong quadruplication, other metropolitan area works and further Gippsland line infrastructure improvements.

### **1.5 Build a circular economy**

#### **28. Facilitate improved recycling infrastructure for priority materials**

Latrobe City Council is supportive of the increasing regional capacity for the recovery of materials as outlined in Infrastructure Victoria's previous advice to Government in April 2020. The Council's direction to support the creation of Victoria's Circular Economy is outlined in the newly adopted Latrobe City Investment Roadmap 2020.

The suitability of Morwell's Heavy Industry Precincts for investment in regional resource recovery infrastructure is bolstered by its central location within Eastern Victoria, land zoning, the presence of buffers, access to national highways, rail networks, energy and water utilities. Additionally, the extent of large vacant land within the industry precinct provides the opportunity to collocate symbiotic processors of recovered material.

These efforts are being undertaken as part of the Gippswide Kerbside collaborative tender process, which is expected to support opportunities for the consolidation of services and aggregation of recovered products and is to be released first half 2021. This tender will be a vehicle for reform and the catalyst for industry certainty to invest in the infrastructure and capital required to transform waste services.

Morwell's industry precincts are well placed to support the establishment of a regionally significant hub for waste resource recovery industries and re-manufacturing. This is considered essential to ensuring contingency and viability of waste services now and in the future.

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Gippsland is well placed to be leaders of the circular economy, with an accessible workforce and current expertise in reprocessing of green waste, plastics, cardboard and paper.



## **Section 2: Manage urban change**

### **2.1 Integrate land use and infrastructure planning**

#### **32. Produce public plans for priority infrastructure sectors**

Latrobe City Council suggests that a whole of infrastructure approach is adopted, so as to apply consistent approach to different sectors. This should involve reviewing sequencing plans so that they match the growth, development and strategic work, and aligning public plans for priority infrastructure with existing growth plans and servicing authority business planning.

#### **34. Review Victoria's infrastructure contribution system to cover gaps**

Latrobe City Council suggests making VicRoads responsible for the delivery of intersections on their roads and addressing any shortfalls, instead of Council, and ensuring that all infrastructure items are covered within the Development Contribution Plan (DCP). Currently, water infrastructure is omitted from DCPs and this appears to be due to Melbourne Water having their own funding arrangements.

### **2.2 Create thriving urban spaces**

#### **39. Transform cycling in Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong**

Why is Latrobe City as one of major Regional Cities and given its current population growth excluded from this recommendation? Cycling is a popular sport and activity in Latrobe City, having hosted major cycling events such as Jayco Sun Tour. We are also home to Haunted Hills Bike Park.

### **2.4 Adapt infrastructure for modern needs**

#### **60. Expand the legislated definition of critical infrastructure and improve information flows**

Latrobe City Council would appreciate the inclusion of the provision of guidance and support to Councils where infrastructure delivery is hindered by infrastructure costs and land fragmentation.





#### **Section 4: Develop regional Victoria**

##### **4.1 Assess market access and productivity**

77. Deliver funding certainty for regional road maintenance and upgrades

This recommendation is highly supported by Latrobe City Council.

79. Fund an ongoing regional rail freight maintenance program

This recommendation raises systemic problems that have been decades in the making. Latrobe City Council encourages the Government to make the necessary commitments to rail to overcome these issues.

We continue to argue that there is a need to rail freight infrastructure for Gippsland, particularly access to the Port of Melbourne for containerised freight and better access to the Port of Hastings for bulk product to both maintain and help grow industry within Latrobe City. In addition, linking Latrobe Valley freight trains to the path of the Port Shuttle would increase the efficiency of the freight task from Gippsland and Latrobe City.

81. Upgrade power supply for agriculture and regional manufacturing

Latrobe City Council would like to see further investigations into these, and opportunities for other services to be upgraded, such as manufacturing etc.

##### **4.2 Unlock regional economic growth opportunities**

In general terms, Latrobe City Council is calling for support for regional Victoria for large scale investment in support of employment and regional development through appropriate funding mechanisms.

Infrastructure costs and constraints continue to hinder economic growth opportunities. As an example, Council has a Food Manufacturing Precinct and the cost to access the site is significant. There are also servicing constraints surrounding water which affects the ability for the precinct to be developed for its intended purpose. State Government assistance for unlocking these types of precincts through appropriate funding models would greatly assist regional councils such as Latrobe City.

In relation to tourism, Latrobe City Council suggests utilising and updating existing infrastructure rather than re-inventing the wheel. The Regional Tourism Boards could lead the identification of region-specific projects. Support is required for regions to carry out tourism audits to ensure that the monies are spent on long term infrastructure – ensuring



continued funding/support for the works implemented, as well as for ongoing promotion and upkeep.

Accommodation providers and attractions in non-coastal locations such as Latrobe City, Wellington and Baw Baw could be supported to encourage more overnight stays.

#### **4.3 Connect the regions to help strengthen wellbeing**

Latrobe City Council is supportive of connecting smaller towns to larger ones through public transport routes to encourage population growth outside of CBD areas. Similarly, there is a need to connect public transport routes to local attractions.

##### **87. Fund libraries to provide better Internet access**

Libraries currently assist with 'closing the gap' for those community members who are already, or are in danger of being left behind in terms of access, capacity and understanding of technology due to poor or no reliable or affordable Internet access. However, it is also likely, based on current experience that the number of technological-disadvantaged people, irrespective of socio-economic status, will increase over the coming years.

To further boost the capacity of the library services capacity to support the community and minimise the impact of technological-disadvantage, it is important to be adaptable to demand for accessible hours, combined with an appropriate level of staffed hours to provide customer support. This may require a move to self-service operations for a portion of this time.

Furthermore, library buildings would require a relatively seamless retro-fitting to enable new technology to be easily implemented during the life of the buildings. Similarly, resources could be dedicated to identify and evaluate technological trends in the library industry and broader community, as well as their value to the community.

We also recommend the development of a city-wide integrated technology training strategy with other local service providers and organisations to ensure that there are options for people who are no longer active in formal education networks or for whom formal education networks are inappropriate.

Additional supports should be provided for active learning programs within the library service and training for staff to keep abreast of the changing technological environment, as well as library lending of devices/ equipment/ software to enable community members to use and test new technology/software that enhances their quality of life as well as their connection capacity, competitiveness and creativity.



#### **4.4 Foster regional Victorians' health, safety and inclusion**

##### **89. Deliver multipurpose shared social service facilities in the regions**

Latrobe City Council recommends that immediately collaborative inter-agency planning for regional social services is undertaken to identify opportunities for multipurpose shared facilities, which are then delivered, where appropriate, in partnership with councils and community organisations.

The fragmentation of social service delivery is well known and complicated by the funding models that promote competition over collaboration. With many agencies providing services, all which have business imperatives to ensure their sustainability, their capacity to undertake real place based contemporary service provision is diminished. The funding models associated with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Aged Care have further complicated the service system for the consumer with confusing entry points and processes. The role of local government as a trusted point of contact to support people to enter in to the service system for the support they require is more important than ever.

Shared facilities and a more 'one stop shop' approach can support the consumer to know where to go, however it alone does not promote collaboration for the best possible outcomes.

The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) could be a useful vehicle to better plan for local infrastructure and collaboration. To assist service sector collaboration, collaborative planning would be helped if local government had articulated governance authority to promote collaboration and services in receipt of State Government funding and have this included in the service agreement.

Shared facilities would also be assisted by a funded navigator role that is managed by local government to assist consumers to access the services and to provide one point of data on demand for future service development. Again, the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing could be the tool to support this work.

##### **90. Support regional councils to update, repurpose or retire outdated community infrastructure**

Latrobe City Council would be supportive of the opportunity to update, repurpose or retire outdated community infrastructure. The nature of rural areas often sees strong community attachment to physical infrastructure which would need to be taken into account during this process. Therefore, funding guidelines need to be cognisant of the time it takes to work with community through this process.



Latrobe City Council also considers it a priority for all community infrastructure to be established with excellent IT connectivity that can remain operational during a natural disaster such as a bushfire, and the highest possible energy rating to ensure affordability for council to maintain.

91. Create climate-adapted facilities for rural communities

Latrobe City Council welcomes this initiative to provide safe local spaces that support climate change adaptation. However, significant resources and clarity of intent needs to be allocated for the planning of these facilities to accessibility for high risk communities throughout regional Victoria. In Latrobe City, there are four main town centres and over seven smaller communities, all of which have been affected by fire and extreme weather events. A network of climate adapted facilities needs to be able to accommodate people within reasonable travel times and be able to support people who need to relocate from their homes for varying periods of time during emergency incidents.

92. Build regional residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation facilities

Latrobe City Council is supportive of the provision of equitable access to residential treatment services. However, post residential rehabilitation services are equally or even more important for people as they return to contribute to the economic and social prosperity of their communities. For some, this requires ongoing specialist medical and pharmacotherapy services which are scarce in regional Victoria, particularly access to addiction medicine specialists and community pharmacies to manage pharmacotherapy. Additional resources to explore the models of community-based services are required to address these.

94. Expand social housing in regional centres, in locations with good access

Latrobe City Council welcomes this investment, however would like further clarification on how the new and existing developments and communities can be created with a focus on sustainability, high quality amenities and the diversity of properties and residents.