

VICTORIAN MULTICULTURAL COMMISSION

INFRASTRUCTURE VICTORIA

**SUBMISSION TO VICTORIA'S DRAFT 30-YEAR INFRASTRUCTURE
STRATEGY**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) is the voice of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities and is the main link between them and the government. The VMC provides independent advice, informed by regular community consultations, to the Victorian Government in accordance with its statutory role under the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*.
- 1.2. The VMC welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on Victoria's Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy (the Strategy) in relation to the draft recommendations. The VMC notes the need for the recommendations to address Victoria's infrastructure challenges and to achieve the identified goals over the coming decades.
- 1.3. The VMC has a statutory responsibility to research, report and advise the government on systemic community issues relating to the full participation by Victoria's diverse communities in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria. Infrastructure is a key element in shaping and responding to the lived experience of diversity and difference.¹ This means managing a built environment that also promotes social order and harmony.
- 1.4. The Australian notion of multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to the nation's cultural and ethnic diversity. It values cultural diversity, and enables people to practice their culture free of discrimination.² While noting the broad scope of the Strategy the VMC is keen to ensure therefore that, in addressing infrastructure challenges, the recommendations are pursued in a manner that furthers multicultural Victoria. Planning infrastructure has the capacity to shape the experience of diversity in powerful ways.

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1. Multiculturalism is simultaneously a nation building philosophy, a policy framework, and a demographic reality.³ The Strategy's vision encapsulates the profound nature that

¹ Fincher, Iveson, Leitner, & Preston, 2014.

² Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2015.

³ Fincher, Iveson, Leitner, & Preston, 2014.

infrastructure has on people's lives, including access to services and labour markets, and affects the strength of our communities. Victoria's population is diverse and as population increases, cultural diversity will also increase as migrants originate from non-traditional departure points.

- 2.2. As home to one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world, Victoria is also among the fastest growing and most diverse populations within Australia. Victoria's diverse population includes more than a quarter (26.2%) of people born overseas, representing over 200 countries.⁴
- 2.3. In response to the top three nominated recommendations the VMC supports actions to increase densities in established areas, manage network demands through a comprehensive transport pricing regime, and invest in social and affordable housing. These priorities are consistent with the VMC's own findings through its regular community consultations and regional advisory council (RAC) meetings.
- 2.4. Access to housing was identified as the number one pressing issue for multicultural communities, especially new arrivals, in 2016. Similarly access to public transport, especially bus services linking to major transport nodes was identified in community consultations state-wide. We acknowledge the inter-related nature of these priorities, and potential to shape the experience of diversity in cities.
- 2.5. Understanding Victoria as everywhere and in every way multicultural is important to bear in mind when planning for infrastructure and seeking to meet the needs of population growth. The question of whether some residents' ethnic and cultural identities are valued or recognised rather than stigmatised or trivialised in relation to others is a crucial element of creating a socially just environment.
- 2.6. The Strategy is a weighty piece of work and commendable in its breadth. Due to the far reaching nature of the draft recommendations this submission responds to certain draft recommendations - contained within Needs 1, 5, 7 and 10 - that we believe are most pertinent to Victoria's multicultural communities, and can be addressed within the time available.
- 2.7. In addition to this submission the VMC, as a consultative body, can offer support to consult multicultural communities as the recommendations are further developed and implemented.

3. NEED 1 - ADDRESS INFRASTRUCTURE DEMANDS IN AREAS WITH HIGH POPULATION GROWTH

- 3.1. The VMC supports increasing densities closer to the city, train stations, transport corridors and major employment centres in line with 'smart city' planning principles. We know from extensive community consultations that public transport is a key barrier or facilitator of accessing local labour markets for young people from multicultural backgrounds.⁵ Transport poverty, an issue raised in regional areas, such as Morwell, Ballarat, Shepparton,

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011.

⁵ Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2015.

Bendigo and Mildura, demonstrated a lack of transport options that severely curtails young people's ability to fully participate economically and socially.

- 3.2. Limited transport options are also a barrier to extra-curricular activities, restricting participation in sports and other recreational pursuits. Transport issues were also raised in consultations in Dandenong in 2015 in the south and east of the metropolitan fringe where intensifying housing development is intended. The recommended transport options such as removing barriers to entry for new market players (draft recommendation 1.3.1), expanded local bus network coverage in growth areas (1.3.2), and expanding the SmartBus network (1.3.3) are all supported by VMC findings.
- 3.3. Through its network of RACs the VMC receives regular feedback about the inadequacies of public transport throughout the state. Our multicultural families and individuals, especially newly arrived, are mostly dependent on public transport. Many also have large families. For example, Loddon Mallee region RAC members reported the Afghani families in the region tended to be larger with between five to eight children. In Swan Hill they reported a number of single parent families, especially people from South Sudan with five or more children. The challenges all newly arrived groups face include accessing affordable accommodation that is near public transport, schooling and other services.
- 3.4. Intensifying housing development in established areas that are already well serviced with infrastructure (1.1.1) would improve urban sustainability and facilitate greater mobility and access to services. Equity will only be an outcome where affordable housing options (as *Need 7*, addressed in more detail below) are considered as an aspect of intensified housing development. Championing equity in order to achieve this recommendation will be vital to its success.
- 3.5. This will entail preparatory work to engage local communities to be well prepared to combat potential social impacts such as 'nimbyism' and the opposition of local residents to medium density and high density in particular. The Strategy should therefore also consider the need to support local government authorities (LGAs) in seeking to achieve equitable outcomes perhaps through raising awareness of the benefits to the overall community. The VMC can offer access to its RAC network meetings to assist in this regard.
- 3.6. While supporting recommendation 1.4 *Make better use of local infrastructure in areas experiencing growth*, we suggest that in undertaking an audit (1.4.1. *Public Space utilisation*), that the audit also be informed by the ethnicity of local communities/LGAs. We further suggest that seeking better use of government assets entails ensuring that these assets meet the needs of all within the local community. This may mean that an asset designed for an earlier era or cohort may not meet the requirements of current residents, especially multicultural Victorians, and also applies to 1.4.4 *Community space refurb/rationalisation* in regard to community assets.
- 3.7. Recommendation 1.4.5 *Public Libraries* is important in addressing the needs of multicultural communities. They provide free services and support that includes a range of collections and programs, including English language courses, and socialising opportunities. In ethnically diverse LGAs like Darebin, Yarra and Dandenong they also provide community language collections as well as access to hundreds of online overseas

newspapers in numerous languages. They also provide important opportunities to socialise, particularly for mothers with small children and school age children.

- 3.8. Public libraries are well utilised by multicultural communities who may lack financial resources to have domestic access to modern technology. Although the majority have mobile phones, housing and living costs, especially with large families can mean that personal computers and internet service are not affordable.
- 3.9. The State Library of Victoria reports that low-income adults were most likely to rely on public libraries as their sole access to the internet and computers.⁶ The library model for public access to technology stands out because of the presence of librarians who provide training and assist users in navigating the internet.
- 3.10. They also reported that internet use and online services in public libraries in Victoria has experienced extremely high growth.⁷ A wide range of factors contribute to the growing demand for free public access to the internet, including more government services, information, resources and transactional activities going online.⁸
- 3.11. It important to align recommendation 1.4.5 *Public libraries* with planning for intensifying housing development in established areas (1.1.1), including any interim increase in state government funding to meet increased population and community needs. Priority should also be given to Victoria's most culturally diverse LGAs, including but not limited to, Brimbank, Moreland, Greater Dandenong and Casey.

4. NEED 5 – PROVIDE SPACES WHERE COMMUNITIES CAN COME TOGETHER

- 4.1. This recommendation is particularly pertinent to the development of multicultural Victoria. The VMC is keen to foster greater mutual understanding and to promote the social, cultural and economic benefits of diversity. It is our aim to encourage all of Victoria's diverse communities to retain and express their social identity and cultural inheritance. We work to permeate multicultural understanding, competence and dialogue in the everyday reality of our work.
- 4.2. Public space is democratic space, however it can also be contentious space. Research conducted by the VMC found that the circumstances in which Victorians from culturally diverse backgrounds faced discrimination was in public space (32%). They also experienced discrimination in the workplace (21%) and in interactions with neighbours (16%).⁹ As shared resources public space should also reflect the cultural diversity of Victoria and the make-up of local populations.
- 4.3. What we, as a society, do in community centres, and in the public spaces where we meet other people is extremely important, not only for the future of local communities but for the future of Australian multicultural society as a whole.¹⁰ Young people told the VMC that

⁶ State Library of Victoria, 2012.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2016.

¹⁰ Adapted from Bauman (2012), whose text includes '...for the future of the whole world.'

“An ideal community was also one with ‘understanding’ and ‘celebration’ of other cultures.”¹¹

- 4.4. At Dandenong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton young people suggested a lack of opportunities for inter-cultural interactions in safe environments – ‘no chance for people to explore differences’.¹² They suggested this was one reason why some people feel they don’t belong, together with regular negative media portrayals of asylum seekers and refugees.
- 4.5. Through this recommendation Infrastructure Victoria can play a key role in promoting socially inclusive communities by breaking down barriers to participation and representation. This recommendation provides an opportunity to raise the profile of local communities as multicultural in spaces where communities come together. Providing spaces (indoor and outdoor) for people to encounter one another in safety offers opportunities that foster intercultural understandings and promote social cohesion.
- 4.6. The VMC supports recommendation 5.1 *Make more strategic investments in cultural and sporting facilities*. In regard to 5.1.1 *Major cultural/sporting infrastructure* and the proposed development of a transparent decision-making framework, we would suggest that this is an ideal opportunity to ensure that the needs of Victoria’s multicultural communities are embedded in the framework.
- 4.7. Each wave of immigration brings with it a contribution that enriches our culture. Migrant communities seek to establish collective, cultural expressions of their identity in places that include commercial environments, recreational facilities and community centres.¹³ Reflecting the cultural make-up of the community in the spaces where they interact is vital to engendering social cohesion through multicultural mores.
- 4.8. This would entail issues of sensitivity to culture for women and girls especially from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) and women and girls with disability. Sport is a very powerful conduit for social change, and the involvement of more females from diverse backgrounds provides additional benefits beyond those derived by females from physical activity.¹⁴ We would strongly suggest therefore that the proposed decision-making framework adopts target groups that include women and girls who are at school, from low income families, NESB, have a disability, and older than 55 years.
- 4.9. In terms of investment strategies it is sensible to include, within the proposed evidence base, the needs of all community members. A local survey conducted by the City of Moreland drew attention to the inadequacy of existing facilities, designed for an earlier era of male participation in sport.¹⁵ For example, contemporary facilities must have separate male and female change rooms, and enclosed shower cubicles for women who tend to be more modest regarding nudity.

¹¹ Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2015.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Fincher, Iveson, Leitner, & Preston, 2014.

¹⁴ City of Moreland Active Women and Girls Strategy, 2009.

¹⁵ Ibid

5. NEED 7 - PROVIDE BETTER ACCESS TO HOUSING FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE VICTORIANS

- 5.1. Housing is a topic raised regularly in RAC meetings by members advocating on behalf of the diverse populations within their communities. More than any other group migrants are required to gain entry to housing markets in Victoria through private rentals. Even skilled migrants who may be in a position to purchase a home may need to rent privately for a time, while the limited resources of other migrants leave them in a more vulnerable position in the open marketplace.
- 5.2. Dominant housing issues impacting upon diverse communities and community subsets include housing costs and the lack of suitable and affordable accommodation, as well as the additional barriers they face in accessing suitable accommodation. For example, larger and extended family groups and single men on Bridging E visa may face added difficulties in private rental residential housing markets.
- 5.3. Currently there is a mismatch between the housing stock and household types which impacts disproportionately upon people from diverse backgrounds and their housing needs. The challenges all groups face include accessing affordable accommodation that is near public transport, schooling and other services. The proportion of all new lettings that were affordable across Victoria was 18.9 per cent in the June quarter 2016.¹⁶
- 5.4. The VMC supports Infrastructure Victoria's main aim to significantly increase the supply of dedicated affordable housing over the next ten years. The VMC has been engaged with Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) in the Residential Tenancy Act Review, with regard to multiculturalism and the housing needs of diverse communities in Victoria.
- 5.5. While there are some concentrations of migrant groups in particular areas, including high numbers of refugee and asylum seeker arrivals in the South and North West metropolitan regions, overall there is relatively wide dispersal of people from diverse communities and subsets throughout the State.
- 5.6. Research has identified that more housing support is needed for humanitarian arrivals in Victoria. Two-thirds of Humanitarian Visa holders were living in the 20% most socio-economically disadvantaged areas of Victoria with housing affordability a large barrier to health, social and economic outcomes.¹⁷ Recommendation 7.1.1 *Housing rental assistance* is therefore supported.
- 5.7. Regarding recommendation 7.3 *Reform planning provisions to support the development of well-located, affordable housing*, 7.3.2 *Affordable housing planning mechanisms* and incentives to deliver affordable rental housing in areas that are appropriate for high and medium density housing, the VMC supports a review of planning provisions and implementation of inclusionary zoning.
- 5.8. SGS Economics Planning has identified inclusionary zoning as a legitimate exercise in value capture by government despite resistance to this as a planning mechanism in Victoria.¹⁸

¹⁶ Victorian Government, 2016.

¹⁷ Davern, Warr, Block, La Brooy, Taylor, & Hosseini, 2016.

¹⁸ Spiller, 2015.

SGS further submits that current planning mechanisms require developers to comply with heritage controls, parking requirements, height limits and many other design and land use mix requirements, which may impinge upon opportunities for commercial gain.¹⁹

- 5.9. Designating 'affordable housing' as a distinct land use within Victoria's statutory planning framework offers a positive externality to support housing permanently available at an affordable rent for lower socio-economic groups in the private residential rental market.
- 5.10. Public and social housing distribution within the inner city demonstrates that without layers of otherwise affordable housing for vulnerable individuals and households, these LGAs would be less diverse. Examples include, Prahran, Carlton, Richmond and Fitzroy. The social characteristics required under Victorian planning law can be met by inclusionary zoning which would also facilitate an additional layer of available rental housing and assist in alleviating rental 'housing stress'.
- 5.11. Research demonstrates that many migrants want to live in mixed neighbourhoods. However, their residential decisions are limited by discrimination in the housing and labour markets.²⁰ For example, approximately two-thirds of humanitarian arrivals in Victoria lived in the 20% most socio-disadvantaged areas of Victoria.²¹
- 5.12. At the time of the last census migration based on humanitarian reasons formed 12% of arrivals to Victoria.²² Humanitarian entrants were predominantly from Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Myanmar between 2001-2011 while more recent arrivals (2010-2015) came from Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar and Iran.
- 5.13. Large populations of humanitarian arrivals live within the LGAs of Greater Dandenong, Hume, Casey, Brimbank and Wyndham. Other areas with significant proportions of humanitarian entrants include the LGAs of Maroondah, Maribyrnong, Moreland and Greater Shepparton in rural Victoria. Inclusionary zoning offers an opportunity therefore to broaden this cultural mix to other LGAs, metropolitan and regional.

6. NEED 10 - MEET GROWING DEMAND FOR ACCESS TO ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN CENTRAL MELBOURNE

- 6.1. In light of our comments above at 3. Need 1 and, 5. Need 7, we support Melbourne's growth needs being shaped to make the best use of available transport capacity (Recommendations 10.1 and 10.3), as well as intensified housing development in established areas of Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.
- 6.2. Intensified housing development requires LGAs to identify specific areas to direct infill development and to make it more feasible, such as establishing priorities, policies, and partnerships, and changing public perceptions.²³ In promoting urban consolidation it is also important to provide housing choices, promote high environmental standards that off-set urban heat island effects and engender quality of life benefits for all residents.

¹⁹ Spiller, 2015.

²⁰ Finney & Simpson, 2009.

²¹ Davern, Warr, Block, La Brooy, Taylor, & Hosseini, 2016.

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011.

²³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2015.

- 6.3. Public perception also affects the appetite for intensified housing development in urban consolidation.²⁴ Bringing the local community along (as 3.5 above) therefore must form part of the exercise by canvassing local communities to measure potential social impacts in order that these can be addressed as part of the process. The timeframe to amend planning schemes within 0-5 years allows for the due consideration of social impacts.
- 6.4. At the same time seeking efficiency in the transport system through *Transport modelling* (10.2.1) and *Transport network pricing* (10.2.2) is supported. Alongside the everyday needs of commuters, newly arrived communities can be vulnerable to isolation and rely heavily on public transport. Isolation and transport needs can also impact upon other needs. For example, going to the Doctor and other essential services and having to rely on public transport to meet appointments, to attend job interviews, or to view prospective residential properties.
- 6.5. Transport network pricing is particularly pertinent to newly arrived and migrant communities. 'Cost' was raised in VMC consultations as another barrier to participation. Service providers advised that cost impacted on social inclusion, such as in sporting activities for children, where the associated costs were prohibitive, including club fees, uniform, boots/shoes, and transport.²⁵ Transporting children in itself could cause significant problems for larger families where the competing needs of children of different ages had to be balanced.

²⁴ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2015.

²⁵ Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2016.

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