

Urban Design Forum Australia



Prioritising spatial planning and good urban design for a liveable Victoria at 10 million

Plan for Victoria submission



Witchcliffe Township, WA

Recommendations for Plan for Victoria

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

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

3. Thriving and liveable suburbs and towns

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Create an integrated policy to deliver Good Design in Victoria

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Coordinate place-based urban intensification

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Transform remaining greenfield land into compact, walkable communities

4. Sustainable environments and climate action

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Introduce spatial visions and plans

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Create greater certainty in planning controls

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Ensure rigorous analysis and design testing when developing planning frameworks

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Establish governance structures that support government collaboration and community participation

5.6

Introduce targets, monitoring and review processes

Urban Design Forum Australia



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 12 months, to provide impartial, expert advice regarding the current suite of planning reforms. This includes:

- Positioning paper, Victorian planning reform: Re-framing urban design at the heart of liveability (September 2023)
- Response: Victoria's Housing Statement (October 2023)
- Workshops with DTP, VPA and OVGA
- Workshops with PIA, AILA, AIA and VicHealth
- Plan for Victoria: Joint submission from an alliance of built environment institutes (August, 2024)

Urban Design Forum Plan for Victoria Submission

As distinct from the Housing Statement focus of our submissions to the Victorian Government over the past year, this Plan for Victoria submission represents an opportunity to step back and consider the threats and opportunities that any Plan for Victoria must encompass when planning for the future of our State up until 2050.

The submission identifies significant opportunities to enhance the structure and focus of Plan for Victoria to address these critical threats, as well as the opportunities to learn from best practice, both locally, interstate and internationally.

Our submission, drawn from committee, member and design practice workshops, encompasses the following elements:

- A concise suite of recommendations for Plan Victoria
- Threats to Victoria, What's at Stake?
- The Value of Spatial Planning and Urban Design for Victoria
- A series of big ideas, organised around the pillars of
 - Affordable Housing and Choice
 - Equity and Jobs
 - Thriving and Liveable Suburbs and Towns
 - Sustainable Environments and Climate Action
- Key elements to the successful Implementation for Plan for Victoria

We look forward to further opportunity to assist in the preparation of Plan for Victoria and attend and contribute to workshops.

Threats to Victoria

What's at stake?

It is important in the preparation of Victoria's highest level strategic plan that we have a clear collective understanding of the challenges faced by our state's communities and natural environment. The threats we face, in terms of climate change, to biodiversity, human health and wellbeing and livability are significant, and should directly inform the making of any effective plan.

Our community notes the following critical existing and emerging challenges facing the prosperity of Victorian in the coming decades:

- The accelerating impacts of climate change through increased frequency and intensity of flooding, heat waves, bushfire and severe storm events
- The urgent need to decarbonise Victoria's economy including the construction sector
- The risk of poorly planned urban growth on congestion, productivity and quality of life
- The challenge of balancing planning for urban growth with the needs of our regional communities
- Declining health and wellbeing outcomes attributable to social isolation, access to healthy food, and lack of physical activity
- Increasing conflicts in the use of non-urban land for biodiversity, energy generation and farming
- The declining financial and staffing capacity of Local Government to plan for and manage growth in our communities

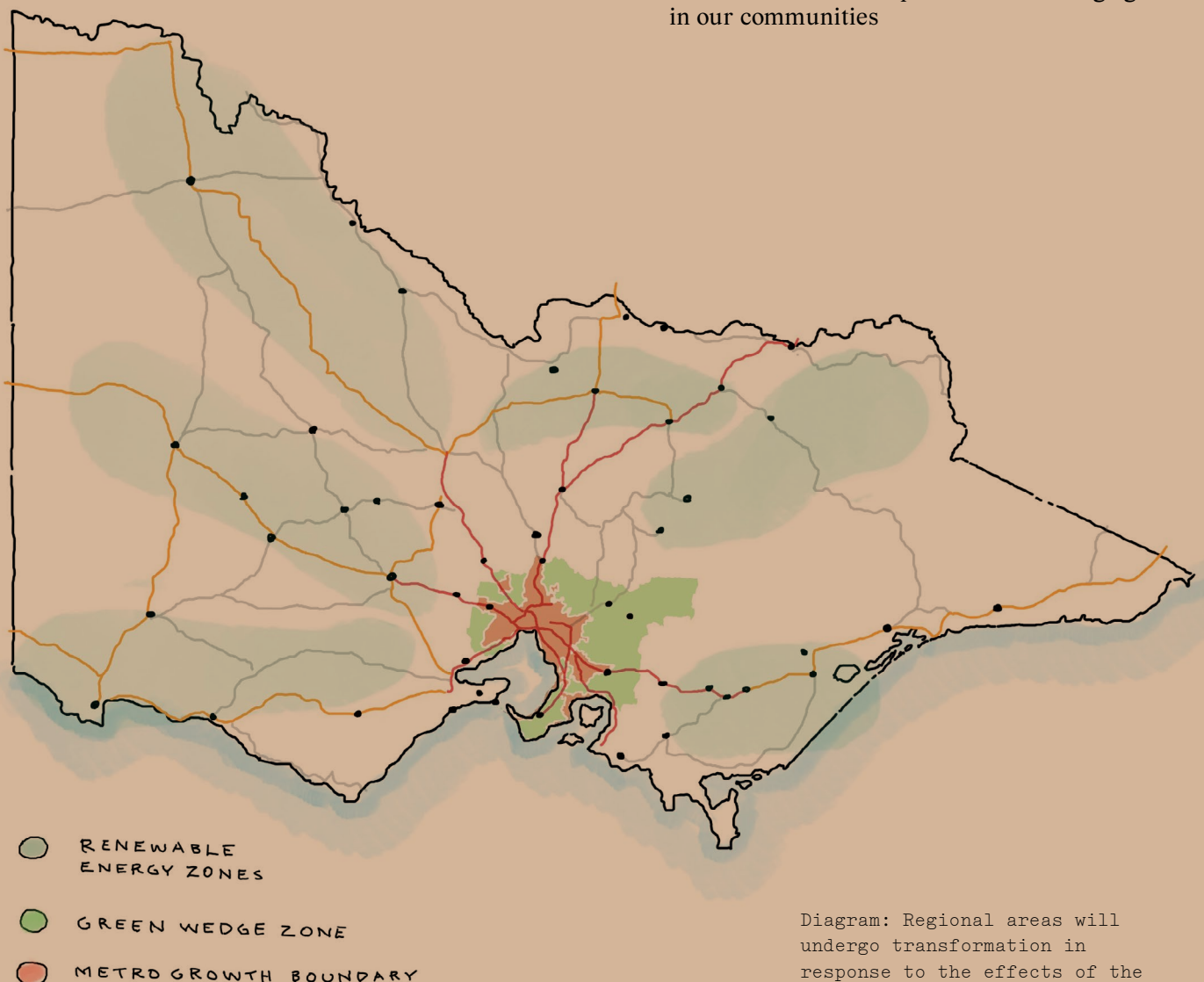


Diagram: Regional areas will undergo transformation in response to the effects of the climate emergency and energy transition.

The Value Of Spatial Planning And Good Urban Design For Victoria

As a framework for our State, Plan for Victoria has a complex task to establish a spatial framework that is relevant to growing urban areas, regional towns, as well as agricultural areas, national parks and a range of other non-urban land uses.

Successful strategic plans around the world consistently adopt a clear spatial framework from the region down to the local, allowing for a strategy to consider the scale of the catchment, bio-region, Country as well as economic regions and transport systems.

It is important that the text based policy and initiatives contained within Plan for Victoria are complemented by a spatial plan, capturing initially the State-level priorities but then in time complemented by regional and local area planning, with the latter to be undertaken by Local Government.

This spatial vision assists in understanding priorities, trade offs or compromises, creates an important impression that is intelligible for a broad cross section of the community and helps to characterise and organise initiatives.

A range of Urban Design Forum's recommendations for Victoria have an explicitly spatial dimension, and it is important that the Plan captures this.

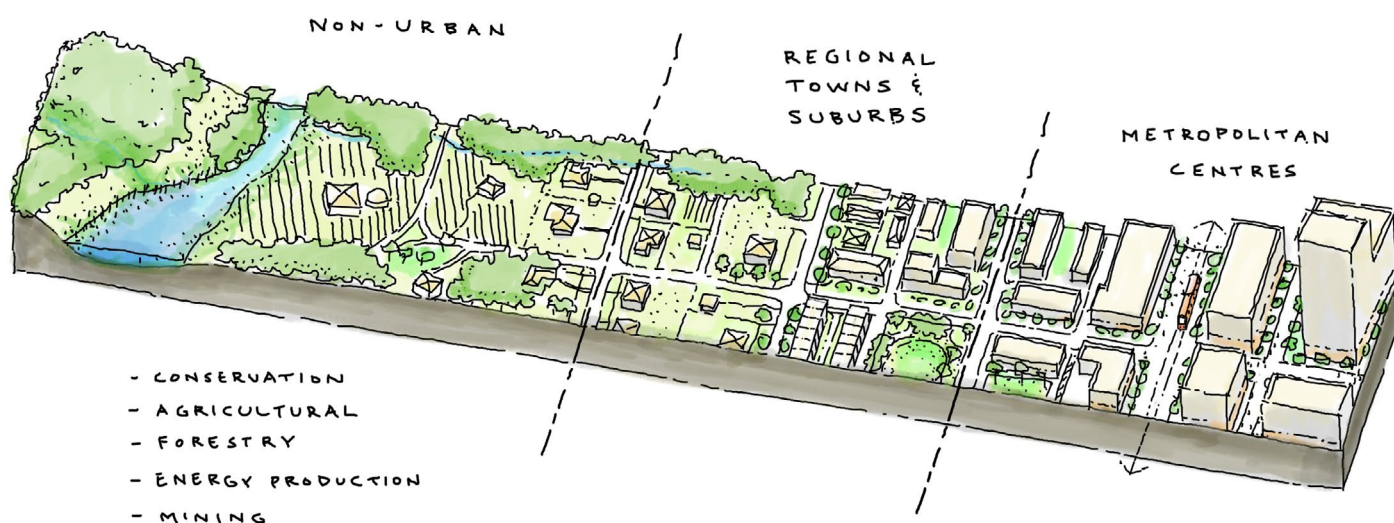


Diagram: In contrast to Plan Melbourne, Plan for Victoria is required to address an even more diverse range of urban and non-urban locations and typologies.

1

Affordable housing and choice



Context

The national housing crisis has led to rushed planning reform across Australia with a focus on increasing supply of market housing. Plan for Victoria must articulate an enduring 25 year strategy for where our housing will go, what form it will take and how we will grow our social and affordable housing stock. This will require legislative change, clear spatial planning for towns and regions and processes that bring communities along for the journey of transformation.

Image: 402 Macaulay Road by Assemble Communities voluntarily includes 20% social housing.

Idea 1.1

Normalise inclusionary housing requirements across Victoria



What is the problem?

Our planning system has proved unable to systematically implement social and affordable housing requirements in private development in a consistent way across Victoria. To date inclusionary housing requirements have been fought and won in a haphazard way through arduous processes on a precinct by precinct basis by Local Government, while legislative barriers in the Planning and Environment Act limit our ability to incorporate requirements across the State.

What idea could address this?

Reforms to the Planning and Environment Act are required to allow inclusionary housing for all projects beyond a threshold density of dwellings - supported by clear minimum targets for social and affordable homes.

An elevated requirement for the sale or lease of any public land for housing purposes, would allow the State to demonstrate leadership, with a formalised collaborative partnership between Development Victoria and Homes Victoria.

Where is this done well?

Section 106 Agreements in conjunction with the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing in London secure the provision of social and affordable housing through the planning system. These targets are established at a city and borough level, and implemented through systematic requirements across private development.

Image: Cannon Road affordable and social housing delivered as part of a regeneration project in London.

Idea 1.2

Establish a settlement strategy for Victoria



What is the problem?

While the need for reform of our greenfield areas on the edge of Melbourne is clear, the principal method of growth for regional towns, large and small continues to be urban sprawl and single family houses, often in piece meal small subdivisions. This model heightens car dependency, entrenches poor health outcomes and social isolation and redirects important investment away from town centres.

What idea could address this?

Strengthen the role of planning for urban and regional town growth boundaries, with greater focus on minimum requirements for density in new subdivisions, housing diversity and infill housing targets, close to existing and proposed transport options. Careful spatial planning at a regional scale can identify opportunities for new compact, net zero townships to complement a networks of towns, avoiding sprawling the edges of existing urban areas.

Where is this done well?

The Netherlands has a long history of preparing comprehensive urban design strategies for town expansions and new town with firm boundaries. The VINEX national housing strategy successfully delivered 450,000 compact, medium density homes in locations accessible by public transport, with densities that support local amenity, and significant open space assets.

Image: Meerhoven is an innovative low-rise medium density VINEX neighbourhood on the edge of Eindhoven.

Idea 1.3

Empower communities to welcome the homes they need in their neighbourhoods



What is the problem?

We have significant, ambitious draft housing targets, which run the significant risk of being derailed politically. This is in part due to the lack of trust from the community in the planning system and a fear of change and the unknown. There is currently a lack of transparent planning for the critical public investment required to ensure liveable communities as neighbourhoods densify, which erodes community support for the purported benefits of density.

What idea could address this?

Support local government to lead deliberative processes in local communities, accompanied by a digital Decision Support System (building on the Digital Twin) – so that communities have greater agency in directing or understanding of the location and form of housing growth. Increased investment, government transparency and capacity building can have positive effects in reducing adversity at the development application stage.

Where is this done well?

Vancouver has demonstrated the value of community agency in directing the form and type of growth, with public investment incentives for achieving housing targets. City of Adelaide has effectively used its digital capability to iterate and illustrate planning scenarios for the central city as part of their City Plan.

Image: Deliberative processes as part of City of Vancouver's Housing Strategy

2

Equity and jobs



Context

As the most significant determinant of travel, the location and accessibility of employment from homes will shape Victoria's mobility story. Plan for Victoria must establish a bold vision for highly accessible employment hubs that reduce travel times, concentrate talent and activity, reduce the pressure on the central city, and drive reduction in vehicular based travel.

Image: Brisbane Metro is an example of local and state government leadership to deliver cost-effective public transport improvements.

Idea 2.1

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

What is the problem?

Vehicle ownership and rates of driving have continued to rise in Victoria post-Covid. If this pattern continues with current growth projections and without transformative investment in our public and active transport network, it will result with unmanageable congestion. In regional areas private bus contracts and incentives prevent effective network planning with wait times averaging 1 hour and no services on Sundays. Mobility transition will require different strategies in our urban and regional areas.

What idea could address this?

Appropriately tailored and context-specific targets for the transition away from private motor vehicle are required in metropolitan and regional settings.

A gridded network of higher frequency bus services is required to be complemented with bike network integration and racks to support bike / bus movement in regional towns. Greater emphasis on intermodal connections is critical to maximising the function of our existing public transport system.



Where is this done well?

In a city without local rail options, Canberra has effectively co-ordinated active transport investment and bus services to allow bikes on buses through the fitting of racks. Smaller buses distribute to trunk lines with larger options, providing an effective network. This offers a model for a range of regional cities and towns, to support a reduction in private vehicle trips.

Image: Canberra's integrated bus and bike network provides a cost effective way of delivering public and active transport.

Idea 2.2

Link density to transport accessibility and investment in transport

What is the problem?

Development density has historically not been reflective of how accessible an area is by public transport. The massive growth in Melbourne's west, without the electrification of the rail line to Melton is proof of this disconnect. The lack of direct policy relationship between development density and accessibility fails to support objectives to transition away from private vehicle use, while impacting local liveability through traffic generation.

What idea could address this?

The Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) framework should be expanded to direct strategic planning for development density across Victorian cities and towns through the setting of effective density controls. Development density should be directly coupled to the level of public or active transport infrastructure, with accompanying location-based targets for the reduction of vehicle usage.



Where is this done well?

WA through the R-Code density control system has a clear relationship ship between Zoning and transport accessibility. Similar tools are used through Residential Densities in the Gold Coast, while planning for growth in NSW is directly linked to the level of non-vehicle-based transport accessibility.

Image: Singapore is well known for integrated planning of transport accessibility and density.

Idea 2.3

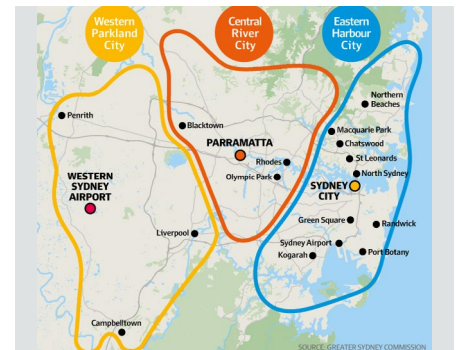
Focus on 'second cities' as hubs for employment and education

What is the problem?

While Melbourne's CBD benefits from agglomeration effects and a radial train network, the city is polarised economically and socially, with few high value jobs in outer suburban areas. While the establishment of National Employment and Innovation Cluster and the planning Suburban Rail Loop have potential, there is significant work required to enable a Melbourne of several viable centres.

What idea could address this?

Establish a clear spatial vision for Melbourne that prioritises investment in 3-4 employment hubs, with excellent access to transport, creating a truly polycentric Melbourne. Instigate a governance and investment framework that enables collaboration from federal, state and local government, the private sector and broader community to deliver this vision.



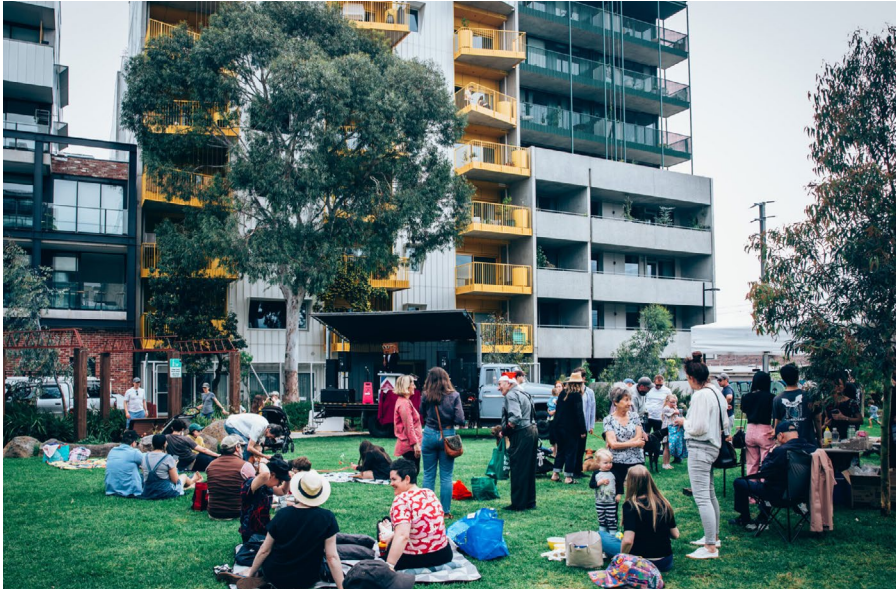
Where is this done well?

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.

3

Thriving and liveable suburbs and towns



Context

The links between health, wellbeing and community resilience and the design of our neighbourhoods is clear. However, new development often occurs on a site-by-site basis, with limited coordination of neighbourhood outcomes that support liveability. Plan for Victoria has the potential to support much greater coordination of the transformation of our cities and regions.

Image: Nightingale Village represents a national benchmark in sustainable mid-rise apartment living close to parks and public transport.

Idea 3.1

Create an integrated policy to deliver Good Design in Victoria



What is the problem?

While Melbourne has long been considered a capital with a strong culture of design, a lack of design policy will continue to deliver substandard built environment outcomes, reducing our liveability, lessening our competitiveness in terms of attracting and retaining residents, jobs and investment, and adding to community resistance to change. A state-wise approach is required to raise the bar across our cities, suburbs and regions.

What idea could address this?

Implement an integrated policy to deliver Good Design in Victoria that elevates good design and amenity above 'acceptable on balance'. Establish state-level standards for good design in different contexts, mandates rigorous design testing for planning frameworks and establish a design excellence program that expands design review programs across Victoria, extending the work of OVGA.

Where is this done well?

The inclusion of Good Design and Amenity as an objective of the Act in NSW along with Better Placed has NSW as a national leader. Subsequently the WA Government through SPP7.0 Design of the Built Environment has created an effective umbrella strategy with State-wide effect.

Image: Better Placed, NSW has given effect to a new 'object' in the legislative framework for planning in NSW, establishing elevated design expectations across the state.

Idea 3.2

Coordinate place-based urban intensification

What is the problem?

Incremental infill development of housing in urban areas is not supported by improvements to neighbourhood liveability such as new and climate resilient public spaces, street improvements and green infrastructure. There is a disconnect between the public investment commitments inherent to greenfield planning and that of infill or brownfield precinct development. As an example, the current Activity Centre plans fail to mandate timely delivery of public realm and green infrastructure.

What idea could address this?

Introduce clearer planning frameworks and state government support for local government coordinate place-based urban transformation. New masterplanning tools and urban design guidelines are required that enable land assembly, quality public realm, open space, and community infrastructure in order to support a larger population. A more robust place-based framework provides clear requirements to ensure that the private sector delivers public benefit through development.



Where is this done well?

The transformation of Green Square in Sydney into a vibrant neighbourhood has been enabled through detailed masterplanning by local government, which set the framework for streets, parks and community infrastructure, with private developers delivering upgrades in line with pre-agreed public realm standards.

Image: Green Square demonstrates significant new open space assets and walkable streets delivered through private development.

Idea 3.3

Transform remaining greenfield land into compact, walkable communities

What is the problem?

The worst human health and wellbeing outcomes consistently occur within low density, amenity-poor and car-dependent greenfield areas. Continued sprawl of low-density single homes diverts valuable energy and resources to inefficient infrastructure. While the 70-30 strategy is a positive step, the strategy assumes that the development of the 30% will continue with limited reform, worsening the impact on our cities and regions.

What idea could address this?

While much of our existing urban fringe land is within approved PSPs there is a significant opportunity to incentivise transformation with increased residential densities and greater housing diversity framed around a network of smaller scale walkable local centres. Prioritisation should be given to child-friendly designed in low speed urban streets, with reduction in urban heat, road surface area and increased permeability and canopy cover. Incentives should closely tie increases in density to investment in public amenity.



Where is this done well?

Witchcliffe, WA is a national exemplar in community-centric low carbon, compact walkable neighbourhoods in a regional setting, adding to the network of regional towns in the Margaret River region while providing a diverse range of housing choices, exceptional open spaces and local food production.

Image: Witchcliffe's diverse housing is designed around a local centre and a network of communal and public open spaces, reducing the quantity of vehicle-based trips.

4

Sustainable environments and climate action



Context

Victoria will experience rapid change in our climate between 2024 and 2050, with parts of the state becoming unliveable due to storm-surge and riverine flooding compounded by the inability to seek insurance. It is critical Victoria establishes a realistic and ambitious series of escalating targets to decarbonise the economy in line with The Paris Agreement while reversing biodiversity decline.

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

Idea 4.1

Lead the transition to decarbonise the construction sector



What is the problem?

Buildings are currently responsible for 39% of global energy related carbon emissions: comprising both operational and upfront embodied carbon. With the Government's draft housing targets and business as usual construction methods we are poised to fail catastrophically in meeting our carbon reduction targets. By 2050 we will need to reach 90% reduction in up-front embodied carbon, however to date there is no road map, education, policy guidance or investment to support this transition.

What idea could address this?

There is an urgent need for Plan for Victoria to establish built environment carbon reduction targets, supported by Sustainability Victoria's oversight. A roadmap is required for upfront embodied carbon reduction, supported by policy and investment across the transport, manufacturing and construction sectors. To be effective the road map must implement short, medium and long term objectives, signal where the industry needs to get to, and have clear increments to enable transition.

Where is this done well?

In Sweden embodied carbon assessments are to be submitted in development proposals in order to adhere to the World Green Building Council commitment to 40% reduction by 2030 and 100% reduction by 2050. Sweden has combined regulation with investment in research and industry capability to expedite the transition to low carbon construction.

Image: BoKlok in Sweden is an example of an industry transforming toward modern methods of manufacturing, with low carbon timber construction.

Idea 4.2

Ensure communities benefit from the transition to renewable energy



What is the problem?

The decarbonisation of our energy grid and rapid expansion of renewable energy generation will generate a significant number of short term jobs across Victoria's regions, presenting the largest economic input outside of agriculture and tourism. There is a risk that short term housing and economic activity associated with these renewable projects fails to deliver long term benefits for these communities.

What idea could address this?

There is a critical need to ensure that any temporary worker accommodation is provided in such a way that it provides in-town housing that can remain in the town in the long term as affordable housing stock. Community capacity needs to be built to funnel new funds into long term programs and community development corporations that address community decline, provide long term infrastructure and employment.

Where is this done well?

Hepburn Energy is a community-led co-operative and an early mover that has demonstrated how the community can benefit from the transition to renewable energy, by keeping returns within the community and creating support for expansion of renewable infrastructure that might otherwise face conflict.

Image: Hepburn Energy is an exemplar in community leadership and local economic benefits resulting from energy transition.

Idea 4.3

Undertake regional landscape strategies to connect fragmented green spaces



What is the problem?

Victoria's current approach to biodiversity within the planning system is dominated by protection of assets and mitigation of impacts from development. Fragmented habitats however continue to decline even if protected, with genetic conditions threatening populations due to isolation and inbreeding. There is a lack of a co-ordinated strategy in metro and regional areas to regenerate and reconnect our ecological networks, with disparate efforts from state agencies and individual local governments.

What idea could address this?

Identification of ecological corridors across Victoria, using existing State-level biodiversity mapping must focus investment efforts and land use planning on the reconnection and completion of corridors for both threatened species and human benefits alike. Metropolitan and regional landscape strategies should be prepared to co-ordinate these outcomes place by place, encompassing opportunities and strategies across existing public land, new public land acquisitions and private land holdings.

Where is this done well?

Taiwan has undertaken a metropolitan landscape strategy to co-ordinate open space and blue green infrastructure at a metropolitan scale. This metro or regional scale of strategy across jurisdictions has co benefits for cycling corridors, community access to green space as well as biodiversity and habitat connectivity benefits.

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.

5

Implementation

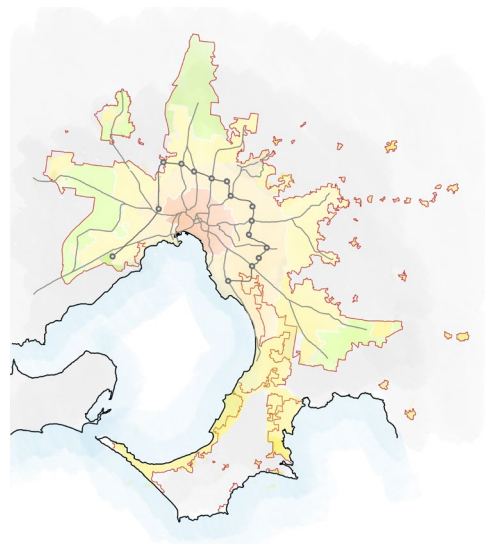
Context

It's important that Plan for Victoria's 'big ideas' are supported with a means of being developed and implemented. The development of spatial plans for metropolitan Melbourne and each region, supported by realistic targets and the right governance structures to ensure their delivery, is essential to bring together what could otherwise be disjointed initiatives.

State



Regional



Local



Diagrams: Given that Plan for Victoria covers such a large area, it is important to include design testing and analysis at each scale.

Idea 5.1

Introduce spatial visions and plans

Plan for Victoria has the potential to include clear, compelling, spatial visions for metropolitan Melbourne and each region. Without spatial visions, we risk lack of buy-in, disjointed initiatives and unintended consequences.

Idea 5.2

Expand use of the Digital Twin to support better decision making

Through further development of Digital Twin Victoria the cumulative impact of each development can be assessed in terms of climate, carbon, biodiversity and mobility, with transparent data driving sophisticated decision making.

Idea 5.3

Create greater certainty in planning controls

Plan for Victoria has the potential to introduce clear planning controls that fix density and public benefit expectations, giving confidence to developers and the community rather than encouraging speculation.

Idea 5.4

Ensure rigorous analysis and design testing when developing planning frameworks

Initiatives that are developed as part of Plan for Victoria, have the potential to dramatically change our neighbourhoods. Consequently, each initiative would benefit from detailed analysis, design testing, review and consultation.

Idea 5.5

Establish governance structures that support government collaboration and community participation

Any plan is only as good as the governance structures in place to deliver it. Establish metropolitan and regional planning authorities, with a state-local democratic mandate, and plan-making and infrastructure coordination abilities.*

Idea 5.6

Introduce targets, monitoring and review processes

Align Plan for Victoria to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and establish realistic targets, not only for housing delivery but also sustainability, open space and transport delivery, and commit to regular reporting and review.

*For more information, refer to Municipal Association of Victoria's Shaping regional and rural Victoria: A discussion paper and Shaping metropolitan Melbourne: A discussion paper, both from December 2023.

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