



Submission to the Treasurer on Victorian State Budget Priorities 2006 / 07

Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)

“The Victorian Government needs to implement these policies by a substantial commitment in the 2006 – 07 State Budget on transport services and infrastructure”

1. The Victorian Local Governance Association

The VLGA is committed to building strong and connected communities in Victoria. We seek to achieve this through strong, consultative, transparent and democratic local governments.

Currently the VLGA has forty three Victorian local governments as members and approximately 100 Community based organisations. These community based member organisations vary from state-wide associations to neighbourhood groups and local progress associations. On top of this the VLGA has a membership of approximately 100 individuals, notably former Mayors, current and past Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), leaders of organisations and members of parliaments both state and federal.

While the VLGA’s membership has traditionally been strong in metropolitan Melbourne the current growth in Council memberships has all been in provincial Victoria. This growth represents increased interest by local governments in engaging and connecting communities and building capacities to advocate on behalf of those communities.

The VLGA’s membership base is unique for a peak body in Australia. The marrying of local government and community interests provides a rare but dynamic fusion of interests focused firmly about communities. The Association is focussed on issues that are about strengthening, connecting and building communities.

The VLGA understands that local government which effectively engage with communities provide a foundation for strong advocacy, shared understandings and strategic planning. It is the Association’s focus on building

strong communities that drives this submission regarding the State Budget strategic priorities for 2006 – 07.

2. Community Building and Access

The VLGA shares the Victorian Government's vision for strong and robust communities. We have watched the increased momentum around 'Community Building' programs and have played our role in supporting and participating in these programs.

The Department for Victorian Communities has over the past few years developed a growing sophistication in understanding 'Community Building' and re establishing local governments agreed and understood place as a key facilitator of community building activity. The State government's Neighbourhood Renewal programs have demonstrated that community strengthening activity, that provides for real local decision making combined with investments in infrastructure and services, do more to strengthen communities than a plethora of 'feel good' initiatives.

Critics of feel good community building initiatives describe these programs as a traditional response by reformist governments that are not prepared to invest in the infrastructure and services required by communities. It is the rebuilding of and access to employment, education, recreation and services that is at the heart of strong and robust communities.

The Victorian Governments 'Growing Victoria Together' commitments provide the basis for renewed investment in transport infrastructure and services. The elements of Growing Victoria Together particularly relevant to transport are:

- More quality jobs and thriving innovative industries across Victoria
- Growing and linking all of Victoria
- High quality, accessible health and community services
- High quality education and training for life long learning
- Protecting the environment for future generations
- Efficient use of natural resources
- Building friendly, confident and safe communities

Victorians require reasonable access to employment, education, services and recreational opportunities that use resources wisely and reduce our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Metropolitan Transport Plan and Melbourne 2030

The VLGA believes in the principles that underpin *Melbourne 2030*. We remain convinced that the provision of expanded transport services and infrastructure is critical to the successful implementation of *Melbourne 2030* and to public and local government's perception and understanding of the State Government's own commitment to *Melbourne 2030*.

The VLGA has supported the directions of *Melbourne 2030* and its early development as the Metropolitan Strategy. We understand and support the need for higher density development and the need to have future development occur in a planned and integrated way that supports principles of sustainability. It is clear that continued growth in an increasingly outward spiral puts huge pressure on the natural environment, stresses services and creates huge infrastructure demands. The VLGA has taken up its place at the *Melbourne 2030 Implementation Reference Group* and is represented on each of the Transport, Housing and Activity Centre Thematic Working Groups.

Growing Victoria Together includes a commitment to increase public transport from nine to twenty per cent of motorised trips within Melbourne by 2020. The VLGA is a strong supporter of this commitment and believes the target is essential to achieving the *Melbourne 2030* vision.

There is little doubt that transport issues are central to *Melbourne 2030*. While the VLGA supports the principles of *Melbourne 2030* we remain cautious about its implementation. Communities, to differing degrees, remain fearful of change and it has become increasingly the work of local governments to explain and manage the difficulties of *Melbourne 2030* implementation at the local level. The State Government has not taken a strong public role in presenting and advocating for *Melbourne 2030* and has left the battleground for many of the contentious issues to local governments and their communities. This has been a source of significant anxiety for local governments. This does not take away from the useful and important work on structure planning and housing that is indeed taking place with a sense of partnership.

The transport concerns of metropolitan and interface local governments have identified the failure to spend on public transport as a key threat to *Melbourne 2030*. It is not to be understated that a significant body of opinion within Victorian communities will continue to be articulated through Victorian local governments in relation to Victorian Public Transport spending.

The release of the *Metropolitan Transport Plan* in late 2004 was welcomed by the VLGA. The *Metropolitan Transport Plan* provides a series of strategies that support *Melbourne 2030* and is a useful tool for future planning. However, the *Metropolitan Transport Plan* fails to provide a commitment to funding from the State Government and leaves the funding of the plan to the success or failure of annual budget bids.

The *Melbourne 2030 Implementation Reference Group* has identified priority transport concerns through two reports to the State Government. The reports on *Implementation of Activity Centres Policy* and the *Policy Implementation Issues Report* both identify priority transport issues, summarised as:-

1. Provide a substantial increase in the allocation of State Government funding for improvements to the public transport system to ensure targets can be met (20% by 2020)

2. Resources for initiatives to encourage cultural change in relation to travel behaviour
3. Ensure the Principal Public Transport Network is rolled out
4. Provide ongoing assistance for activity centre development including appropriate infrastructure investment and roll out of the Principal Public Transport network
5. Provide guidelines on preparation of integrated transport plans that are required for new major residential, commercial & industrial developments
6. Develop a new partnership between State government, local governments, police and transport operators to visibly improve safety and perceptions of safety on and around public transport
7. Ensure that infrastructure is provided to new estates in a timely manner and that the planning of fringe developments maximises access to pedestrian networks, public transport and bicycle networks

And most significantly,

8. Release the integrated transport plan (Metropolitan Transport Plan) with guaranteed funding for implementation and delivery.

The current *Metropolitan Transport Plan* fails to guarantee funding for implementation and delivery and leaves funding to the annual budget process. The VLGA strongly urges the Victorian State Government to make significant investment in the transport system to see the strategies identified within *Melbourne 2030* and the *Metropolitan Transport Plan* a reality.

The *Metropolitan Transport Plan* identifies investment in a third line on the Dandenong line, upgrades at the North Melbourne interchange and extensive development of new bus services. All of these require investment and a clear commitment from this State Budget.

The 2005 – 06 State Budget made partial commitments towards these initiatives.

Melbourne 2030 will drive change in Melbourne's environment, land use, density and mobility. Development and growth in Activity Areas will continue alongside growth in outer metropolitan corridor municipalities. While inner Melbourne is well serviced by public transport infrastructure the lack of new spending will be a risk to *Melbourne 2030*. Communities that will have to accept greater densities around activity centres will require a demonstrated commitment to improved infrastructure and amenity as a trade off. On the other hand communities emerging in the new growth centres are highly car dependant as little in the way of new services have been developed. Growth

municipalities and their almost universal dependence on car use will seriously challenge the 20% by 2020 vision.

The VLGA urges the Victorian Government to ensure that *Melbourne 2030* becomes a reality and not just a vision, and we urge the Victorian Government to acknowledge that further community buy-in is required to deliver on *Melbourne 2030*. Substantial re-focussing of Budget priorities towards Public Transport is required.

The VLGA acknowledges the size and scale of funds required to fully fund the *Metropolitan Transport Plan*. The VLGA continues to urge the government to hear the growing number of voices calling for changes in public transport spending and move to both increase funding and explore the serious options and choices that also exist to fund this investment. The examination of innovative taxation, parking, congestion or development levies all warrant further examination by this government to realise its commitment to *Melbourne 2030* and the plan for 20% by 2020. Equally, State Government stratagem to maintain surplus budgets at all costs needs to be reconsidered against the costs to Victorian quality of life and productivity of not investing in our public transport system.

4. Transport and Liveability

The VLGA has seen an increasingly sophisticated response and advocacy to transport and liveability issues by local governments, particularly metropolitan local governments.

An example is the recently released report “The Economic Benefits of Investing in Public Transport in Melbourne” prepared for the Metropolitan Transport Forum by Jan Scheurer, Jeff Kenworthy and Peter Newman. It examines Melbourne’s performance and reputation as one of the world’s most liveable cities.

The report demonstrates that Melbourne’s public transport system performs poorly in terms of both supply and performance when compared to our closest contenders for the title of the world’s most liveable city. Public Transport is limited in its ability to compete with the private car due to:

- the length of Melbourne’s road network,
- the provision of parking in the CBD,
- the size of the vehicle fleet owned by individuals and businesses

The report identifies the shortfalls in Melbourne’s Public Transport system as:

- slow and poorly connected trains and buses
- infrequent services

This significant report identifies that:

“Melbourne has invested less in the expansion and improvement of its public transport infrastructure than other Australian and comparable overseas cities. While user costs of private vehicle travel remain relatively low, the share of metropolitan wealth spent on transport and mobility in Melbourne is high”.

Five major policy levers are identified in the MTF report;

1. *Network supply policies*: eg. provision of roads, pedestrian, cycling and public transport infrastructure
2. *Network efficiency policies*: eg. cross-modal and cross-operator integration, electronic congestion management
3. *Network demand policies*: eg. parking restrictions, TravelSmart, taxation pricing signals, road user charges
4. *Vehicle performance policies*: eg. low-emission incentives, emission monitoring
5. *Land use policies*: eg. transit-oriented developments, urban growth management.

The VLGA notes that the Victorian Government’s policy base for sustainable transport is largely evident through:

- Melbourne 2030 and the commitment to 20% modal shift by 2020
- The Metropolitan Transport Plan,
- The Greenhouse Strategy.

Essentially the concerns of Victorian metropolitan local governments are that the Victorian Government needs to implement these policies by a substantial commitment in the 2006 – 07 State Budget.

Provincial Framework

The VLGA acknowledges the commitment of \$51 Million announced in the ‘Moving Forward’ program for provincial Victoria. This announcement demonstrates a commitment to rebuild provincial communities and acknowledges the links between access, transport infrastructure and services and community building, however more needs to be done.

The commitment demonstrates that the State Government has responded to the specific demands and transport hot spot issues identified and advocated for by local governments and communities over the past eighteen months. The State Government needs to be congratulated for responding to these specific requests and lobbying.

It is significant that the commitments provide for new transit bus services within provincial towns experiencing strong population growth and new bus services to connect small towns in remote regions.

While metropolitan Melbourne's transport concerns (while not funded) do exist largely in Melbourne 2030 and the Metropolitan Transport Plan, no such policy base exists for provincial Victoria. Provincial Victoria is the subject of even less forward planning for public transport improvements than metropolitan Melbourne. No comparable plan to *Melbourne 2030* or the *Metropolitan Transport Plan* has been developed for the State as a whole. Nonetheless, provincial Victoria also faces important choices about priorities for transport spending and service improvements.

The VLGA urges the Victorian Government to develop a Framework for provincial transport planning that allows for the identification of local and state wide priorities. A Provincial Transport Framework would provide provincial communities with the certainty that improved transport and mobility access, which underpin community cohesiveness and access to community services, will be delivered.

A framework could deliver significant mobility improvements for provincial Victorians through better coordination and utilisation of transport services and infrastructure. The continuation and expansion of the Transport Connections program is vital for the ongoing cohesiveness of provincial communities, and provides a high return for relatively modest investment through better utilisation of existing resources. The impending completion of the Fast Train projects also provides an opportunity to strengthen the coordination between bus and train networks, an issue of increasing concern to provincial communities that are questioning the value they have received from the Fast Train projects.

Bridging the Gap

A significant plank in any framework for provincial transport planning that seriously identifies local and state wide priorities and acknowledges the commitments already made in 'Moving Forward' will identify the significance of provincial bridges in supporting and building community connections.

The commitment to invest in new transit bus services within provincial towns experiencing strong population growth and new bus services to connect small towns in remote regions is significant.

Roads and bridge infrastructure requires substantial investment and maintenance costs for governments. Provincial local governments carry an enormous burden for the capitalisation of this infrastructure. The commitment to strengthen new transit bus services within provincial towns and to better connect small towns provides for a targeted way to prioritise the funding of provincial bridges by the State government.

The VLGA sees a clear link between strengthening bus services in and between towns and providing funding to the bridge infrastructure that will carry these and existing provincial bus services including school and community buses.

The VLGA urges the Victorian Government to create a funding scheme to support bridge infrastructure that specifically targets provincial Victoria's public transport needs as an essential plank in a provincial transport framework with a specific budget commitment. The commitment for two for one funding for Community Infrastructure' announced as part of the 'Moving Forward' statement provides a starting point for this funding scheme.

Conclusion

- **Community strengthening activity that provides for real local decision making combined with investments in infrastructure and services do more to strengthen communities than a plethora of 'feel good' initiatives.**
- **Victorians require reasonable access to employment, education, services and recreational opportunities that use resources wisely and reduce our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.**
- ***Growing Victoria Together* includes a commitment to increase public transport from nine to twenty per cent of motorised trips within Melbourne by 2020. The VLGA is a strong supporter of this commitment and believes the target is essential to achieving the *Melbourne 2030* vision.**
- **The VLGA notes that the Victorian Government's policy base for sustainable transport is largely evident through Melbourne 2030 and the commitment to 20% modal shift by 2020, the Metropolitan Transport Plan and the greenhouse strategy.**
- **The Victorian Government needs to implement these policies by a substantial commitment in the 2006 – 07 State Budget.**
- **The VLGA urges the Victorian Government to develop a Framework for provincial transport planning that allows for the identification of local and state wide priorities.**
- **A Provincial Transport Framework would provide provincial communities with a certainty of improved transport and mobility access, which underpin community cohesiveness and access to community services.**
- **The VLGA urges the Victorian Government to create a funding scheme to support bridge infrastructure that specifically targets provincial Victoria's public transport needs as an essential plank in a provincial transport framework and as a budget commitment.**