

**TOWARDS A MORE LIVABLE FUTURE FOR VICTORIA**  
**CHOOSING A SUSTAINABLE LAND USE**  
**AND TRANSPORT PATH**

**ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA VICTORIA DIVISION**  
**TRANSPORT BRANCH**

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Towards a More Liveable Future For Victoria

## Choosing a Sustainable Land Use and Transport Path



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## Choosing a Sustainable Land Use and Transport Path



### Summary

The decisions that Victorians make today on major transport and land use challenges will set the direction for the liveability of Victoria for many years to come. The Victorian Transport Branch of Engineers Australia believes that how these decisions are reached will profoundly affect the type of state we live in, and the legacy we will pass on to future generations.

It is timely to reflect on how land use and transport decision-making can be strengthened in Victoria. We believe that some of steps to achieving more sustainable outcomes for Victoria are:

- Understanding challenges, not just reacting to problems.
- Developing plans and delivery processes together
- Achieving sustainable growth
- Preparing for an uncertain future
- Sustainable funding

In order to meet the challenges the Victorian Government needs to take a leadership role focussing on:

- Meeting today's operational challenges while preparing for the future.
- Understanding the true implications of the emerging challenges and possibilities for action.
- Engaging with stakeholders to better understand the challenges and to build consensus on actions.
- Working collaboratively to prepare for the future.

We believe that the steps outlined in this paper will equip Victoria to achieve a more sustainable and liveable future. Failure to plan and act properly will commit future generations to not only solving their own challenges, but to also sorting out the problems this generation bequeaths them.

## Why is Engineers Australia Transport Branch involved?

Melbourne and Victoria will face many challenges as they continue to grow over the coming decades. These challenges will be greater and the solutions harder if dwindling resources and unsustainable development processes are not addressed today. "Business as usual" or "muddling through" will not be enough to respond to these challenges.

Crowded transport, a lack of locally accessible jobs for many, congested freight routes, high levels of land take-up and growing greenhouse gas emissions are all examples of trends that must be reversed if Melbourne is to be more sustainable and liveable.

The future of Melbourne and regional Victoria are intertwined so the two must be developed together. Transport and land use decisions have a profound effect on the quality of life of all Victorians, on the state economy and its environment. The Victorian Transport Branch of Engineers Australia is committed to helping achieve a strong, sustainable and liveable Victoria. This paper is a contribution to thinking about how to achieve a more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future.

Noting that there is no shortage of ideas for new transport infrastructure and expanded services, we do not propose particular transport projects and actions in this paper. Instead, we focus on how we can collectively make better decisions about transport and land use.

There is an emerging national debate on sustainable growth and how to achieve it. Most notably the Federal government has recently acknowledged that cities are an issue of national importance. Victoria has skills to lead this national debate rather than waiting to react to the ideas of others. By taking a leadership role Victoria can shape the debate.

## Why have a vision for Victoria?

Planning the way forward requires first knowing where we want to go. We call on the State Government to articulate a vision for the State with objectives that will shape decision-making. The vision should reflect Victoria's distinctive characteristics and needs.

### Protecting future transport options

EastLink, Western Ring Road and South Morang rail have all demonstrated the benefits to future generations of governments planning long term transport needs and protecting transport corridors. Recently the Outer Ring Corridor has been identified as a multi-modal transport corridor.

By identifying and protecting future transport corridors, essential infrastructure is able to be built at the time it is required. It also provides certainty for private and public sector investors to build infrastructure that complements future transport services. Future generations will benefit from far-sighted decisions made today.

The Transport Integration Act provides an excellent starting point, identifying six objectives for transport and land use:

- Social and economic inclusion
- Economic prosperity
- Environmental sustainability
- Integration of transport and land use
- Efficiency, coordination and reliability
- Safety and health and wellbeing

These objectives, however, do not go far enough to provide a concrete basis for future decision-making.

## Barriers to achieving a more sustainable transport system for Victoria

Many commentators have described the social, environmental and economic challenges facing Victoria as the state grows. We are not entering the debate on what size Victoria or Melbourne should be, nor commenting on the merits or otherwise of specific projects. Our view is that, even with modest rates of growth, the state will face significant challenges in the coming years.

We have focussed our attention on how governments, businesses and communities can collectively prepare to meet the transport and land use challenges that will inevitably emerge over the coming years.

### Understanding challenges, not just reacting to problems

*"For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong"*  
-- H. L. Mencken

Land use and transport interactions are complex but often debates around them are simplistic. Complex issues are reduced to simple emotive and meaningless catch phrases – “eliminate congestion”, “high density is bad” or “low density is bad” – without a proper understanding of what the real challenges are, the real trade-offs often associated with decision-making or if the “solution” is worse than the problem. Advocates of different transport modes or land policies often have “solutions looking for problems”.

A reactive approach to problems can result in ad-hoc and short-term responses. This can just transfer problems to future generations. As Victoria’s population grows, continued incremental change may not be enough to meet increasing needs and a step change to new systems could be required. Determining the best course of action requires careful analysis, honest debate and bold decisions based on a long-term perspective and a vision for Victoria’s future.

Actions need to be tailored to match situations for different parts of Melbourne or Victoria. When trade-offs are unavoidable, they need to be considered in a transparent way so that the basis of a decision is clear.

A challenge for government is to become the principal sponsor for data gathering and evidence-based analysis – and then to encourage informed debate by disseminating this information into the broader community. Too often this information is released in an ad-hoc manner as advertising spin or is drip-fed through freedom-of-information (FOI) procedures.

## Developing plans and delivery processes together

Recent public debates around urban consolidation have shown that policies need to be developed as part of an integrated approach to meeting long term needs, and also at the detailed site level. Intensification of urban development remains vital to Melbourne's sustainable future, but more attention must be given to improving the quality of physical designs, responding in a genuine way to community concerns and improving delivery mechanisms. The community is concerned that planning and decision-making practices have been neither open nor transparent.

Discussion needs to be honest about the likely future population and employment demands at the municipal level, so that planning is relevant to emerging needs and is realistic.

## Achieving sustainable growth

Achieving economic growth for its own sake is not sustainable. Sustainable growth based on productivity improvement and modernising the economy is fundamental to increasing real income and business output while reducing the use of resources, especially non-renewables. Different economic sectors, such as knowledge, manufacturing, agricultural and service industries, have different needs and are therefore likely to need different transport actions that reflect their situation so "one-size-fits-all" decisions will not be appropriate across Melbourne and Victoria.

One of the key economic challenges for government is to identify the role transport and land use can play in decoupling economic development from energy consumption. We note that inner Melbourne is rapidly moving in this direction with population and economic growth occurring without increasing private motorised traffic. However, middle and outer Melbourne continue with the old paradigms of non-sustainable growth. More should be made of the many good examples of sustainable development as means to encourage wider take-up.

## Preparing for an uncertain future

Victoria's future population and employment numbers are far from certain, but it is clear that growth will continue as long as Victoria enjoys economic growth and remains a desirable place to live.

Many changes will occur over the coming decades. Some will be internal to the state, such as the population mix between Melbourne and regional Victoria, while others will be external, such as interstate and international migration rates. The recent Global Financial Crisis has shown how interrelated and fragile the world economy is, and future shocks such as peak oil will inevitably change transport and land use priorities. Few, if any, of these already known risks have been addressed properly in Victoria's current plans and they should not be ignored in future thinking.

Good planning does not guarantee a particular future but it can shape the most desirable way forward. It can help build resilience, reliability and sustainability into Victoria's transport and land systems so that they can accommodate growth and respond to shocks. It provides us with the flexibility we will need to respond to these changes, and provides a robust framework upon which to allocate scarce public and private resources.

## Sustainable funding

Improving infrastructure and services will require significant funds. Current public/private sector approaches are inadequate to fill backlogs or to meet the needs of the future. Present settings – taxes, levies, subsidies – have evolved over time and can send conflicting signals, such as Fringe Benefits Tax encouraging car use over public transport for businesses. Their effect on transport pricing, real and perceived, have a strong, and not always positive, effect on transport choices.

Part of any preparation for future challenges must include a new look at the role of pricing and funding of transport and land use. It is essential to be clear as to why funding models are adopted. If the purpose is to fund new infrastructure or operations, or to influence traveller behaviour, the most appropriate approach to funding is likely to vary.

When the private sector is involved in delivering transport, the market settings in which companies operate need to be designed so that they firstly achieve the outcomes sought by the community, while still providing a return on to the investors.

The federal government is increasingly linking funding commitments to evidence of long term land use and transport planning. For Victoria to be successful in receiving its fair share of our national infrastructure dollars, we must place our transport decisions in the broader context of both our vision for Victoria and the associated productivity and liveability improvements we expect to achieve.

The challenge posed by establishing a sustainable funding model is an issue of national importance. This is an area where Victoria should lead the national debate by demonstrating new and innovative approaches. There will be significant gains for the state by being an early adopter of such solutions.

## What can make a difference

In order to meet the challenges the Victorian Government needs to take a leadership role focussing on:

- Managing today's operational challenges while preparing for the future.
- Understanding the true implications of the emerging challenges and possibilities for action.
- Engaging with stakeholders to better understand the challenges and to build consensus on actions.
- Working collaboratively to prepare for the future.

### Meeting today's operational challenges while preparing for the future

Short-term operational challenges, such as implementation of myki, can understandably take much of the attention of government. The risk with this short-term focus is that planning for medium term system enhancements and long term more fundamental transformational actions are neglected. If this occurs we will set up a cycle of reacting to short term crises rather than building a stronger state.

Parallel action is essential at the short term (ensuring that the system works), medium term (enhancing the system) and long term (transforming the state) (Figure 1)

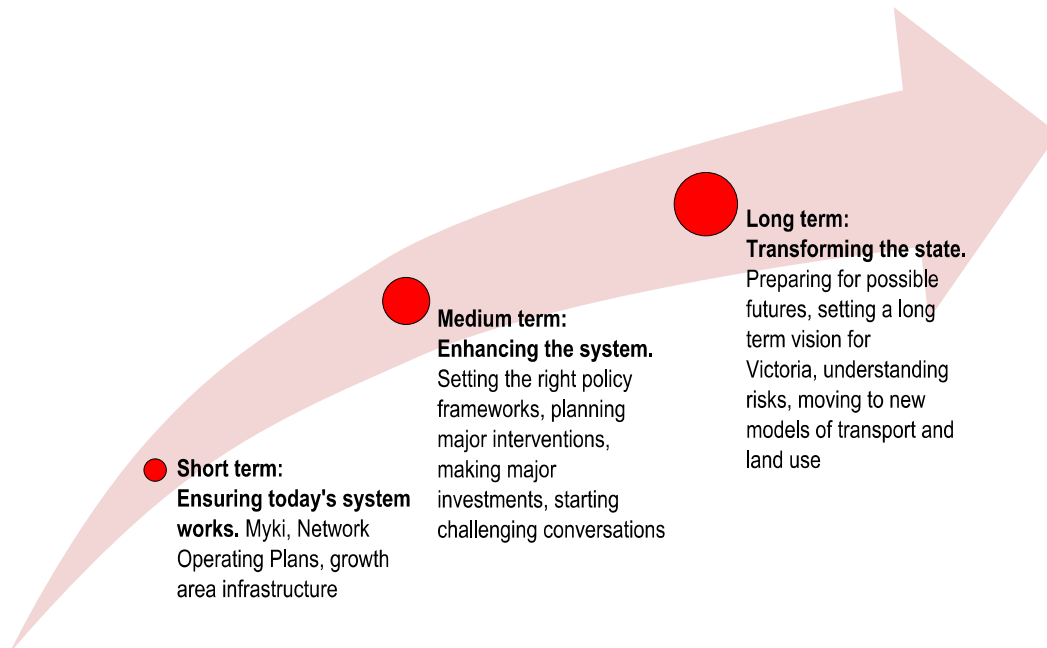


Figure 1. Solving today's challenges while preparing for tomorrow's.

It is vital to have a long term vision and non-negotiable outcomes and targets for urban and regional areas. These could be concerned with key objectives like business productivity, equity of access and emissions reduction. Short-term actions should be consistent with the vision and progress in delivering the vision should be measured against the outcomes or targets.

### Priority actions

1. Identify desired outcomes and establish performance targets for transport and land use in Victoria using a broad consultative process.
2. Assess the existing transport and land use system against these targets to establish the deficiencies which exist today.
3. Produce sustainable transport and land use plans for Victoria, Melbourne and major regional centres that provide clear frameworks for the private sector and communities to make their own decisions.
4. Review the effectiveness of Victorian land use and transport bodies in delivering sustainable transport and land systems in Victoria that will meet emerging needs.

## Understanding the true implications of emerging challenges and the possibilities for action

Government has a responsibility to use its considerable resources to undertake transparent analysis and report on the challenges facing the state, to identify alternative futures that might emerge and to explain the implications of possible actions. In order to test the actions clear Triple Bottom Line evaluation principles and steps are required.

Over recent years population and employment growth rates have varied greatly. Rather than selecting one population and employment forecast, planners should transparently develop scenarios for future land use patterns and transport investments and test their implications. The state is not homogenous and so “one size fits all” thinking is not feasible and a more sophisticated approach is necessary.

We should not be planning for a point in time, such as Melbourne at 2050, or a certain size of city, such as Victoria at seven million people, but how to accommodate change more or less continuously. It is the rate of growth and its nature, such as how the age, culture or skills mix of population or industries will change, that needs to be better understood and properly planned for.

We must also have established plans to deal with known and emerging risks. The community rightly expects the Government to have contingency plans to deal with issues that can be reasonably foreseen.

### Priority actions

1. Identify and publish realistic scenarios for metropolitan and regional development and test each for their implications for achieving economically, socially and environmentally sustainable outcomes, including foreseeable risks.

2. Provide an annual ministerial statement on the performance of the transport system, progress on delivery of plans, forward plans and emerging challenges.
3. Review and implement best practice planning for cities facing similar challenges to Melbourne.

## Engage stakeholders to better understand the challenges and to build consensus on actions

Governments are often unnecessarily secretive and averse to criticism in their deliberations. Too frequently, more effort is put into selling in-house ideas than developing good ideas with those affected by government decisions. Genuine engagement is needed on emerging challenges and the implication of transport and land use alternatives. At times public debates, especially when they concern controversial issues such as congestion pricing, will be challenging but they are essential if sound decisions are to be made.

Victoria has had a history of cross-party support for some of the key building blocks of Melbourne, such as the Green Wedges. Although there have been some recent differences of view there is still a broad consensus across the community that these are areas to be protected.

Public engagement increases the chance of broad community-wide endorsement of key transport and land use planning directions. This helps to provide certainty for business and personal investments, minimise community backlashes when plans are implemented and reduce electoral-cycle swings that create confusion and add to community and business costs.

### Priority actions

1. Implement genuine community and stakeholder participation in key transport and land use issues.
2. Take active steps to de-politicise long-term land use and transport planning processes.

## Working collaboratively to prepare for the future

### Bring local government along

Freight and logistics planning in Victoria can be compromised when State actions are not supported by local government. This occurs when there is no continuity between the different levels of government, or between adjacent councils. Planning and managing trips from door to door, bringing local government along with State thinking, working on logistics chains and not modal solutions, planning land use and transport networks together are all essential for efficiently getting products and services to customers.

To community members and businesses, the level of government responsible for different parts of the transport system is immaterial. Users expect that Commonwealth, State and local governments will work collaboratively and consistently to deliver the best outcomes. Progress has been made over recent years to improve co-operation between all levels of government in planning and delivery, but more needs to be done.

The State should work collaboratively as partners with councils, regional council groupings and the Municipal Association of Victoria on key issues, such as city and regional development, and on delivery of integrated freight and logistics systems.

Recent gains made in strengthening integration of the work of the Department of Transport and the Department of Planning and Community Development should be continued so that transport and development decisions on metropolitan and regional areas are complementary.

Government should not allow delivery agencies that have a necessary narrow service delivery charter to distort integrated government priorities through their actions. The Department of Transport should continue to set the multi-modal framework within which delivery agencies - such as the proposed Victorian Public Transport Development Authority and VicRoads - deliver infrastructure and services.

### **Priority actions**

1. Establish clear accountabilities for the development of transport and land use plans, and for the delivery of programs.
2. Work with local government to ensure that the planning and delivery of transport and land use in both levels of government is complementary.
3. Involve key stakeholders in the design of the Victorian Public Transport Development Authority so that it is non political and has a strong customer focus.
4. Continue to strengthen Victoria's dialogue with the Commonwealth to influence the impact of national transport and land use agendas on Victoria.

## About the Engineers Australia Victorian Transport Branch

The Transport Branch represents professional engineers and planners engaged in transport infrastructure and land use planning. Our members are typically employed in the consulting, government, industry, education and research sectors.

We exist to help transport engineers contribute to our community through:

- Providing continuing professional development and networking opportunities
- Advocacy on transport and related issues
- Encouraging entry of new transport engineers into the profession
- Facilitating links between transport-related organisations and professions

The Transport Branch will continue to advocate on issues affecting the community, and maintain an active role in contributing to the debate on Victoria's transport future.

The Branch would like to thank members and non-members who contributed ideas to this paper. The final paper represents the views of the Branch and not individual contributors.

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