



By Email

11 March 2016

Mr Michel Masson  
Chief Executive Officer  
Infrastructure Victoria

Dear Mr Masson

**RCV's response to Laying the Foundations**

Thank you for including Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) in your recent stakeholder workshops.

RCV comprises the Mayors and CEOs of the 10 largest cities in regional Victoria – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga. We are a regional leadership group dedicated to building a sustainable Victoria by providing strategic advice, coordination and advocacy to State and Federal Governments to support policies which enable Victoria's regional centres to grow and develop.

RCV's member cities also act as regional hubs, supporting surrounding districts (e.g. rural towns) through the provision of education, health, financial, transport and social services, as well as retail, sport and recreation, cultural and tourism amenities and activities.

RCV is very supportive of Infrastructure Victoria's bold plan to develop a much needed strategic, long-term approach to infrastructure development in the state and we commend your policy team on the work already undertaken to develop the *Laying the Foundations* ('*Foundations*') document. We also appreciate your willingness to receive feedback.

As such, after careful reading of the *Foundations* document, RCV's response is one of disappointment at the seemingly cursory manner in which regional Victoria has been treated in your initial thinking, a point raised not only by us, but also by other representatives at the workshops.<sup>1</sup>

RCV agrees with you that "Victoria is connected to other states just as regional Victoria is connected to Melbourne."<sup>2</sup> Victoria has in fact been referred to as the State of Cities. However, using language such as "central city"<sup>3</sup> to refer to Melbourne is backward thinking as far as RCV is concerned. Infrastructure development should see regional cities as 'central' to rural towns, thus creating a network of 'central' cities.

Regional Victoria grew by 11,000 people (.08%) in the 12 months to June 2014, reaching 1.4 million, which is nearly twenty-five percent of Victoria's population. Across the state, the population of regional Victoria is projected to increase to 1.86 million by 2036, representing six per cent of Australia's total population growth in that period.<sup>4</sup>

Regional cities have the capacity to accommodate significantly higher population levels than are being currently planned for. Existing research shows that the most effective drivers of sustainable population attraction to rural and regional Victoria are jobs, good infrastructure and access to services and lifestyle.

Developing new infrastructure and renewing existing facilities in regional cities will improve regional economies by stimulating further population growth and attracting additional private and public investment. It will also help to

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<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure Victoria, Stakeholder Workshop No.4

<sup>2</sup> Infrastructure Victoria, *Laying the Foundations*, page 6

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, page 7

<sup>4</sup> Regional Growth Fund, State Government of Victoria



alleviate the population pressure in Melbourne by making regional cities a more progressive and viable living alternative.

With such significant projected growth and potential, it would appear more appropriate that in the next iteration of your strategy development include a much more intensive focus on the needs of regional Victoria. However, in its current form, your document does not appear to recognise that.

It is also unclear to RCV as to how Infrastructure Victoria plans to incorporate into your strategy the extensive work done by other government agencies, namely Regional Development Victoria (RDV), who have themselves developed structures and programs to manage infrastructure development in regional Victoria.

RDV's key objective is to "focus is on supporting the Government's vision of creating a stronger regional Victoria through job creation, better infrastructure and new investment."<sup>5</sup> And to do so, RDV recently launched the *Regional Statement* ('Statement') which is intended to "give regional communities a stronger voice in government decision-making by directing priorities identified by regional communities straight into the heart of the Government's agenda."<sup>6</sup>

At the core of the Statement is the establishment of nine new Regional Partnerships across Victoria with representatives from community, business and all three levels of government. RCV members constitute the largest local government representative in each of these partnerships.

This new approach recognises that every region is different, and that government needs to change how it operates to respond to the needs of our rural and regional communities – not the other way around.

The Statement was developed after consultation with around 700 regional stakeholders, including RCV and in our opinion provides an excellent framework in which to test the relevance of a strategy such as yours, when referring to regional Victoria.

RCV understands that the *Foundations* document does not make any recommendations to government and that in fact the final strategy will not be released until Q4, 2016.

We are pleased that you intend to keep working with the community and key industry stakeholders to develop the final strategy and request that a meeting be held between our Executive Management Group and the Infrastructure Victoria policy team before the next phase of strategy development in order to ensure the needs of regional Victoria are properly considered. We are also very keen to share with you research that we have commissioned that will help inform your work including:

1. "Implications of Population Growth on Infrastructure and Resources in Regional Cities" by Essential Economics
2. The Wider Regional Benefits of Investment in Regional Cities, 2014, Regional Cities Victoria

Chanmali Tregambe from our Secretariat will be in touch shortly to set up a meeting. In the meantime she can be contacted on 0488 440 058.

Regards

**Cr Rod Fyffe**  
**Chair**  
**Regional Cities Victoria**

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<sup>5</sup> Regional Development Victoria, <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au>

<sup>6</sup> Regional Statement, <http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-statement>