

**SUBMISSION TO
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, JOBS, TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES
REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL REVIEW**

BACKGROUND

Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) was formed as an advocacy body in 2000 to represent the whole of regional Victoria. Regional cities are at the heart of regional Victoria and by improving their infrastructure and liveability, they help to grow and support wider regional and rural communities. RCV comprises the cities of Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga.

As regional hubs, these cities support surrounding districts 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's vision is *building a sustainable Victoria through regional growth* and as such the organisation has a very clear interest in the outcomes of the Regional Economic Development Strategy and Service Delivery Model Review. RCV congratulates government on its initiative in undertaking the review and welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission.

FOSTERING REGIONAL GROWTH AND JOB CREATION

RCV played a key role in the establishment of the Regional Growth Fund in 2011, which provided funding of \$1b over eight years to build strong, vibrant cities and country communities. Regional Cities Victoria strongly believes that a fund which operates in a similar way, providing ongoing investment to important projects across Victoria, is key to delivering regional growth. Continuing to build upon this concept through successive governments will be very beneficial for Victorian regional and rural communities.

RCV commends the State Government on its commitment to a \$100m investment in regional city CBD revitalisation over four years. Investment in revitalisation works in regional city centres will enable further CBD-related strategic planning, encourage investment in central areas, improve public transport options to increase patronage and access into CBDs, deliver a consistency in style and amenity in city centres, increase pedestrian traffic, increase accommodation options and importantly, create jobs.

Furthermore, making regional city centres more vibrant and appealing will encourage the presence of a skilled workforce, thereby contributing to equity of access to services (such as specialist medical care and financial services). This will enable the community to access such services locally, rather than having to travel to Melbourne. Given the extent of regional city catchments, these benefits

extend to surrounding districts, thereby helping a significant percentage of regional and rural communities.

RCV believes the most effective partnerships for building economic strength within regional communities are those that exist between state and local governments, the private sector and community sector. This is particularly so in the case of infrastructure development. Enhancing and strengthening existing inter-governmental relationships and building on achievements to date will provide a strong foundation for forward progress across Victoria.

Regional cities require an investment in infrastructure for the provision of new facilities and the renewal of existing infrastructure. Increased financing for regional city infrastructure will improve regional economies by stimulating further population growth and attracting additional private and public investment. It will also help to alleviate the population pressure in Melbourne by making regional cities a more progressive and viable living alternative.

These regional cities have a combined population of nearly 800,000 people, which is expected to increase to almost 1.1 million by 2031.¹ Across the state, the population of regional Victoria is projected to increase to 1.86 million by 2036; home to around 25 per cent of Victorians.² In order to prepare for the anticipated growth, investment in new residential infrastructure is critical.

In order to encourage economic development through various industries and increase employment and education, as well as social and tourism opportunities across regional and rural Victoria, RCV believes improvements to transport corridors are critical. Connectedness between key regional cities through the regional metropolitan passenger rail system and improvements to road and rail networks to the more remote regional cities are important.

Developing a stronger regional airport network will also further support the concept of connected communities, between regional cities and to Melbourne, in turn boosting tourism to regional areas and providing more efficient business travel options.

Providing industry-specific training within the local TAFE structure that accurately reflects the regions evolving employment needs will also be necessary to ensure opportunities for growth. Enabling local people to train or re-skill where they live not only provides real career opportunities for regional people but also helps build resilient and vibrant communities.

RCV strongly supports the existence and maintenance of regional strategic plans and regional growth plans in elevating thinking to the highest strategic level within regions and would like to see them supported within the new structure.

Supporting this work, the regional cities have access to the Regional Cities Growth Framework diagnostics tool which provides data to support longer term regional and city planning.

¹ Implications of Population Growth on Infrastructure and Resources in Regional Cities, 2012, Essential Economics

² Regional Growth Fund, State Government of Victoria
(http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/188322/RGF-6295_12pp-BOOKLET_web.pdf)

REGIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY

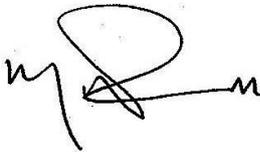
RCV strongly supports the presence of State Government departmental staff in the regions and would welcome serious consideration of strengthening the presence of government departments, co-located with Regional Development Victoria. Having strongly connected departments at the regional level, reflecting the structure which exists at the state level, makes for a more efficient, effective and holistic approach to the management of priorities and issues for local communities.

RCV believes elements of various departments such as agriculture, environment and primary industries could be effectively grouped at the regional level.

In order to enhance efficiency, RCV encourages the government to provide regional directors with greater autonomy and delegated authority. This would ensure smaller scale matters such as grant extensions are dealt with at the local level, rather than moving up through the departmental structure to the relevant Minister's office. This would considerably reduce the time involved in progressing such matters.

RCV views earlier decentralisation of key government departments, such as the Transport Accident Commission to Geelong, the State Revenue Office to Ballarat and Rural Finance to Bendigo as important in the provision of additional employment opportunities and an injection of energy into regional centres. RCV encourages government to continue to give serious consideration to the potential for major government departments to be relocated to regional cities, for example the previous proposal to relocate VicRoads to Ballarat.

RCV looks forward to the outcomes of the review and the further strengthening of partnerships between local and state government, the private sector and community sector, in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for communities across regional Victoria.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Neoh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cr Mike Neoh
Chairman
Regional Cities Victoria

9 April, 2015.