



## OPINION

February 2026

If this were a medieval tale, I suppose I'd be cast as Robin Hood.

Not because I wear green tights or roam Sherwood Forest – but because I'm standing outside the gates of power asking why the treasure collected from the people isn't finding its way back to them.

According to allegations now emerging, up to \$15 billion from Victoria's metropolitan Big Build may have been funnelled through the CFMEU to bkie-linked interests.

In the old legend, the Sheriff of Nottingham took from the many and protected the powerful.

In modern Victoria, regional communities are wondering whether something similar is happening – whether money raised from taxpayers across this state went into vast metro projects, only to be siphoned away from the public good.

And while this was happening, regional Victoria was being told there wasn't enough money for our projects.

In 2022, just prior to an election, we were promised the Commonwealth Games, then told they would cost around \$7 billion – too much. The Games were dumped and Victorians paid hundreds of millions so others could host them.

In 2023, the Victorian Government scrapped the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund – an investment program that once allowed councils to partner with the Commonwealth and private sector to deliver the infrastructure that underpins homes, jobs and liveable communities.

Now it's practically government folklore, but for decades it was practical governance.

It helped deliver community hubs, sporting facilities, revitalised town centres and economic precincts. It was how regional Victoria turned opportunity into delivery.

We desperately need it back.

But we aren't storming the castle for \$15 billion, and I won't be wearing tights.

Instead, we are proposing a transparent plan for \$1 billion investment in regional Victoria.



One billion dollars – to restore a Regional Fund that unlocks up to 300,000 homes by funding the pipes, poles, roads and services that make development possible.

One billion dollars – to back investment-ready economic drivers like the inland port in Wodonga, the Circular Economy Precinct in Ballarat, the Clean Energy Centre of Excellence in Warrnambool and the Aerospace Technology Precinct in Latrobe.

One billion dollars – to build the community infrastructure that attracts families and businesses.

Stop taking from regional Victoria and start giving back. It's not like we're not already contributing.

We generate more than 25 per cent of Australia's global food and fibre exports. The Regional Movers Index shows our cities leading population growth as people choose opportunity beyond the capital.

Robin Hood wasn't about rebellion. He was about correcting imbalance when the system lost its way. In every good legend, the imbalance is corrected.

Regional Victoria is ready to build homes, create jobs and drive growth.

All we are asking is that the wealth collected from Victorians is used for Victorians – openly, responsibly and in places ready to turn it into happily ever after. The End.

**Cr Ben Blain is Chair of Regional Cities Victoria and Mayor of Warrnambool**