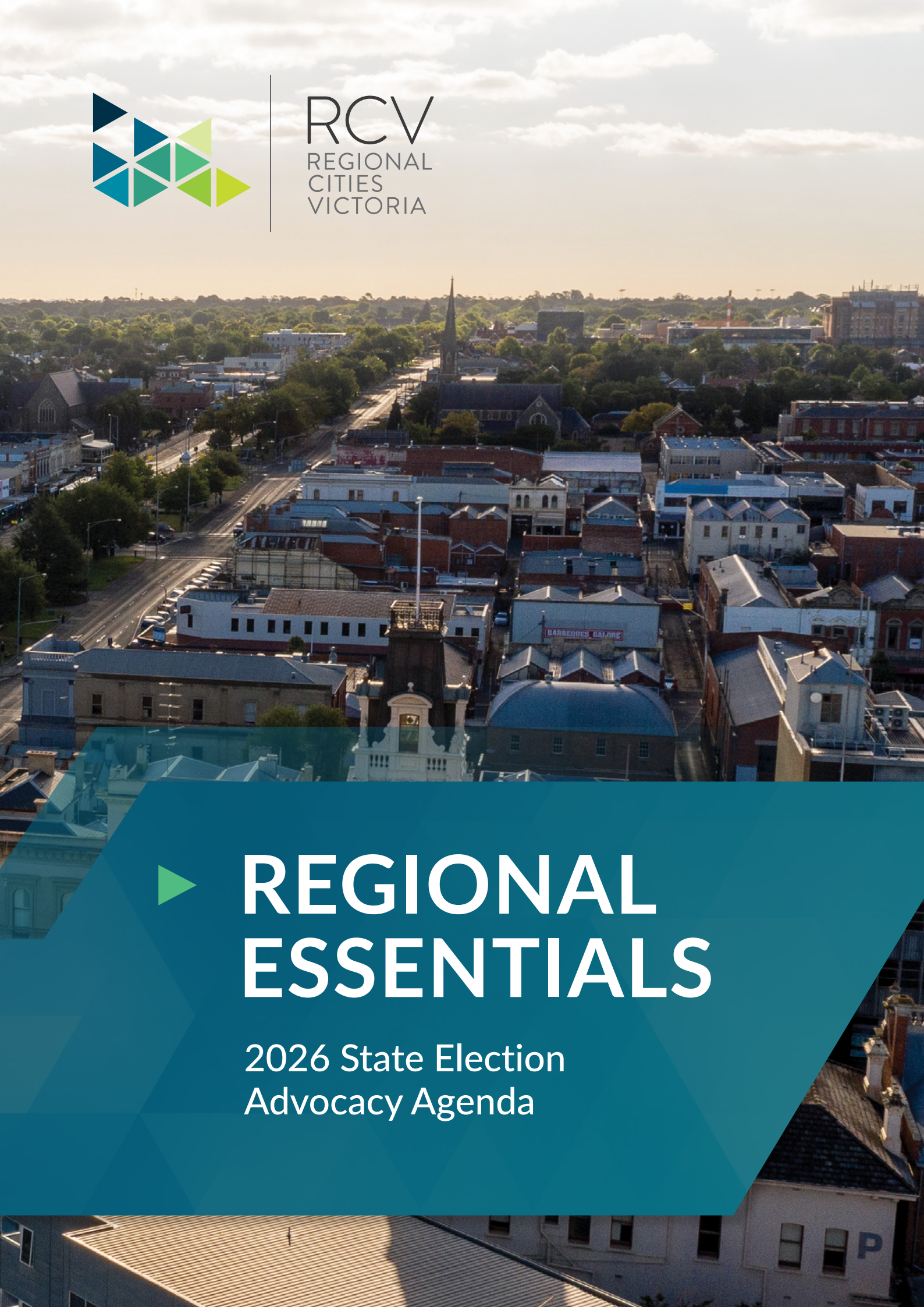




RCV
REGIONAL
CITIES
VICTORIA



REGIONAL ESSENTIALS

2026 State Election
Advocacy Agenda

About Regional Cities Victoria

Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) is a regional leadership group dedicated to building a sustainable Victoria by providing strategic advice, coordination, and advocacy to state and federal governments.

Comprising the Mayors and CEOs of the 10 largest cities in regional Victoria – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool, and Wodonga – RCV is focused on achieving real change in regional Victoria through policy development and implementation.

As regional hubs, our cities support surrounding towns and 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 for regional prosperity and enhanced liveability through sustainable growth. To realise this, we develop and advocate for policies that invest equitably and sustainably in regional cities to support a growing and prosperous Victoria.

The member councils of Regional Cities Victoria acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay our respects to tribal elders past, present and emerging. We celebrate their continuing culture and we acknowledge the memory of their ancestors.



Essential regional investment

Transformative investment in Victoria's regional cities is about more than just building new homes – it's about building a stronger, fairer Victoria.

Our member councils have done the work. Through significant local investment, community consultation, and long-term strategic planning, our regional cities are ready to meet Victoria's 2051 housing targets. But meeting these targets requires more than setting numbers – it demands a growth plan that delivers benefits for the entire state.

To unlock the full potential of our regional cities, we need the essentials in place: essential infrastructure like water, energy and safe roads; an essential workforce to deliver it including planners, engineers and surveyors; essential transport links that drive our growth; and the investment to match our ambition.

As we approach the 2026 Victorian state election, the path forward is clear. With genuine consideration of the rural and regional context, and the right support from government, our regional cities can play an essential role in the plan for Victoria's future.

Regional Cities housing target total

280,950
— by 2051 —

- ▶ **10,800** homes every year
- ▶ **208** homes each week
- ▶ **30 houses a day** for the next 26 years



The legacy of regional investment – and the gap left behind

For more than two decades, dedicated regional development funds – delivering up to \$125 million annually – have played a pivotal role in underwriting growth, creating jobs, and strengthening communities in regional and rural Victoria.

These funds have consistently supported co-funding partnerships between local councils, the state, the Commonwealth, and the private sector; enabled communities to pursue strategic priorities with long-term impact; and underpinned the liveability and prosperity that now defines Victoria’s regional cities.

Our cities consistently rank among the most desirable places to live in Australia², and this momentum requires ongoing support.

The discontinuation of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund in 2023³ has left a significant gap in regional economic development policy.

Since July 2015 it facilitated approximately 13,000 jobs and more than 1000 projects.⁴

The fund’s final round delivered 110 grants totalling \$116 million with an investment return of more than \$670 million and the creation of almost 2000 jobs.⁵

At a time when metropolitan infrastructure programs receive investment in the hundreds of billions⁶, Regional Cities Victoria is seeking an equitable share of strategic investment to realise regional Victoria’s potential.

The establishment of a \$1 billion Regional Fund will ensure:

- ✔ balanced and inclusive growth across the state;
- ✔ equitable access to government investment;
- ✔ confidence and certainty for regional communities, businesses, and local governments.

A renewed focus on regional Victoria is not just timely – it is essential.



A \$1 billion regional fund

Regional Cities Victoria is calling for the establishment of a dedicated \$1 billion regional fund to support essential community infrastructure, housing development, and workforce capability across regional Victoria.

This fund will deliver the structural investments required to drive sustainable population growth, economic productivity, and liveability in Victoria's regional capitals, ensuring they remain competitive and resilient as they continue to grow.

The regional fund will deliver outcomes across three critical pillars:

▶ Projects of scale and ambition

- Enable large-scale, transformative community infrastructure by leveraging co-investment between the Commonwealth and local governments.
- Priority project categories include arts precincts, aquatic centres, regional transport interchanges, and other civic infrastructure that underpins regional prosperity.

▶ Unlocking housing

- Fund the delivery of essential infrastructure and services to help develop affordable homes and grow well-serviced communities.
- Investment will focus on water, power, sewerage, roads, intersections, and drainage, allowing regional housing developments to move from planning to construction more quickly.
- Priority projects must be complemented by redesign of existing regional transport services based on assessments to meet local needs.¹

▶ A workforce for growth

- Establish a targeted “earn while you learn” program to address critical workforce shortages including planning, building surveying, and civil engineering.
- Provide funding of up to \$100,000 per student employee per year to ensure a pipeline of qualified local government professionals ready to deliver the infrastructure and housing regional communities need.







\$2 billion for regional roads

RCV is seeking an extra \$500 million a year over four years to fix local and declared (state) roads, above and beyond the Victorian Government's existing almost \$1 billion annual regional road maintenance program.

The condition of regional roads has become a major safety concern for all Victorians.⁷ Victoria's Transport Accident Commission's lives lost data shows that over a five-year average 30 more lives are lost on rural roads than on Melbourne roads.⁸

Delayed maintenance, ageing infrastructure and neglect result in hazards – particularly potholes – that are endangering lives, hindering industry and impacting the state's competitiveness and growth.

Despite \$964 million⁹ allocated to road maintenance for 2024 and another \$976 million¹⁰ committed in the 2025/26 Victorian Budget, latest targets from the Department of Transport data indicates just 2.7 million square metres of maintenance is scheduled for the 2025/26 financial year, equal to 1.6 per cent of the state's 173 million square metres of regional roads.¹¹

If nearly \$1 billion in funding now delivers maintenance to just 1.6% of the network, then further investment of \$2 billion over four years is not only justifiable – it is essential.

A \$2 billion boost to regional roads will ensure:

- ✓ Improve road safety and reduce fatalities on regional roads;
- ✓ Restore economic productivity by supporting freight, agriculture, and tourism industries;
- ✓ Ensure value for money, by reversing the decline in infrastructure condition before costs escalate further;¹²

A \$2 billion boost to regional roads is a down payment on safety, connectivity, productivity, and equity that will benefit all Victorians.



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