



THEME 3

Well-planned, connected and resilient built environment

KEY ISSUES: PLANNING AND BUILDING; COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT; INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORT



PLANNING AND BUILDING

CURRENT SITUATION

The State Government has a critical leadership role to play in ensuring our built environment – our homes, our workplaces, our towns and cities – are safe, sustainable and great places to live, work, and visit.

Since the introduction of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Victoria's planning system has become well known for incorporating community consultation in planning. It is a component of our system that is enshrined in legislation and provides democratic legitimacy to planning decisions.

In recent years there has been a shift away from local decision making, towards centralised decisions made by DELWP or the Minister for Planning. These decisions are often made with little or no public consultation and lack channels for further appeals. Protecting the community's voice in the planning system through council-based decision making is a priority concern for the local government sector

The planning system should deliver on the environmental and social needs and priorities of our communities. Too often planning is treated as a vehicle for short-term economic stimulus with little regard for the long-term consequences this has on our built and natural environment.

The Victorian building regulatory system is at a crisis point. It is unacceptable that so many homebuyers find themselves left with unsafe buildings, expected to bear the cost of rectification for defects they had no fault in. Urgent reforms are needed to ensure greater rigour is applied through building approval processes.

We are eager to engage with the State Government on significant reform to the building regulatory system and local government's role in it. However, the current push to transfer responsibility from the VBA to local government for addressing cladding rectification and orphaned building permits ignores the lack of building surveyors available to local government and hinders efforts to find a consistent and timely resolution for building owners.

WHAT WE NEED FROM THE STATE GOVERNMENT

- A commitment to protect the democratic legitimacy of the planning system by respecting local decision making
- Reform of Victoria's building regulatory system to provide safe buildings and adequate resources to councils to play an increased role
- Review of the planning system to ensure that community benefit is prioritised over private financial windfalls, including through improved infrastructure contribution mechanisms and greater provision of social and affordable housing
- Transparent reporting on the net community benefit and economic gain expected from major planning decisions and reforms
- An evidence-driven and state-led approach to ensure that planning schemes accurately reflect and manage environmental hazards and increasing climate change risks
- Improvements to the planning scheme amendment process to ensure councils can develop and implement local policy in an efficient and timely manner.

BENEFITS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

- Communities provided with meaningful input into the planning decisions that shape their neighbourhoods
- Improved safety of buildings, consumer protection for building owners, and restored confidence in the construction industry
- Infrastructure, including social and affordable housing, that meets community expectations
- Communities that are safer from environmental hazards.

CURRENT SITUATION

Local government's cradle-to-the-grave involvement in people's lives, and links to community groups and local businesses provide a solid foundation on which to build effective community resilience.

In the critical area of emergency management, councils have supported communities through the pandemic, and coordinated relief and recovery from severe bushfires, storms and prolonged power outages.

In 2019, a state-facilitated assessment through the State Government's Councils & Emergencies project found sector-wide capability and capacity gaps in several of councils' critical emergency management roles.

Despite this, there has been no investment in sector training and development, nor an increase in funding commensurate with their expanding role.

Emergency management is complex and the stakes are high. It is critical that councils are empowered and adequately funded to lead local resilience building, support local planning and effectively coordinate local-level relief and recovery.

While there has been significant reform and investment in family violence prevention since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the opportunities available through local government are yet to be fully realised. Recent co-design of the Local Government Guide for Preventing Family Violence is a significant step forward, particularly for the 15 funded councils. The next step will require ongoing resourcing and support to be fully embedded across the state.

Introduction of the Gender Equality Act (2020) has been welcomed by the local government sector, however, the absence of resourcing or sector-specific guidance has resulted in duplication of effort and reduced the potential impact.

WHAT WE NEED FROM THE STATE GOVERNMENT

- Expand the annual \$4.98M Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program to cover all 79 councils, with a reviewed formula based on risk and capacity, and invest immediately in training for councils' statutory emergency management roles. Significantly higher levels of ongoing funding, reflective of risk and community expectations are essential. As an immediate step, an additional \$7M is needed to fund one FTE in each council, while a transparent risk and capacity based formula is developed
- Dedicated funding for local hazard mitigation works and community resilience building
- Support councils to expand implementation of the Local Government Guide for Preventing Family Violence and meet obligations under the Gender Equality Act to strengthen community safety and cohesion.

BENEFITS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

- Building on recent investment in councils to support primary prevention of family violence by expanding the Free from Violence program to engage additional councils will fast track and consolidate this work across the state
- The Free from Violence investment is an example of the State Government recognising councils' reach into and understanding of local communities. Similar investment through councils to support community resilience and pandemic recovery is needed
- Sufficiently funding and supporting councils' emergency management role will mean communities are better supported to prepare for emergencies and help lead their own recovery
- Adequate resourcing of councils to implement obligations under the Gender Equality Act will be more cost effective, reduce duplication, ensure the intent of the Act is actualised and lead to more equal outcomes for communities at the local level.



INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORT

CURRENT SITUATION

Communities across the state are seeing increased pressures on paths, roads, transport, infrastructure, and community services driven by population changes and economic growth and the increasing cost of asset maintenance.

Better integration of state and local land use and infrastructure planning and improved data is essential to improve safety, productivity and accessibility for critical services and improve community connection.

Six years of rate capping has fuelled the crisis for local road networks and many other community assets and services. The current State Governments' preference for inflexible, time-limited grants programs often overlooks the need to renew existing infrastructure, such as ageing swimming pools, which is often the local preference.

Compounding factors, such as Victoria's Big Build and supply shortages, have impacted the cost and availability of materials and contractors.

Locals know what locals need so increased autonomy for councils to direct grant funds will deliver better local outcomes.

Noting that light vehicles account for around 10 per cent of Australia's total carbon emissions, an accelerated transition away from internal combustion engine vehicles to zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) should be considered an urgent priority. An equally, if not more, important focus should be supporting mode shift away from private vehicle use to active, public and shared transport options.

WHAT WE NEED FROM THE STATE GOVERNMENT

- Commitment to a collaborative approach to transport and infrastructure planning, including project sequencing, by state and local government, as a valuable partner and community representative
- Fund councils for the delivery of local priorities. With diverse needs prioritised by different communities, this must allow for local projects such as walking and bike riding infrastructure, road safety and local road construction.

- The MAV calls for \$230M over four years for priority walking and cycling projects in all Victorian councils and the establishment of a Local Road Blackspot Treatment and Prevention program targeting local intersections, road segments or users to reduce risk, as well as funding for proactive treatment of sites identified as potential future priorities through safe system assessments.
- Support councils to access better data and information systems to improve their asset management capability.
- Continued state investment in safe school access, including provision of indexed annual funding to truly match local government contributions to the school crossing supervisor program, plus funding to deliver safe system works to reduce reliance on supervisors and encourage safe active school transport
- Commit to acting on findings of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Electric Vehicles, including exploring the feasibility of joint state/local government procurement of electric vehicles and improving electric vehicle infrastructure, including public charging stations, across Victoria.

BENEFITS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

- Councils use their strong community connections and intricate understanding of local needs to support decision making and investment
- A shift away from programs requiring quick delivery of shovel-ready projects to programs with minimal administrative burdens and greater flexibility will enable longer-term planning for asset maintenance and renewal, and support collaboration between levels of government and neighbouring municipalities
- Lower-scale infrastructure investment that recognises local priorities and needs has the potential to make a significant difference to Victorians' safety, health and wellbeing, all while increasing productivity and stimulating local economies
- Transition to electric vehicles is a necessary step to reducing emissions. The right policy settings and sustainable investment will encourage community uptake of ZEVs and support Australian innovation and business growth in this important industry.