

Strategic Plan 2022–2026

Acknowledgement of Country

The Northern Councils Alliance acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Taungurung people, who are the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Melbourne's north.

We recognise the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage within our region and their deep and continuing connection to the land and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Elders past, present and emerging who have and continue to reside in our region and are an important part of our region's history and future.

Who we are

We are the Northern Councils Alliance, or NCA. Our role is to advocate, collaborate and deliver on projects that will improve the lives of our residents and outcomes for our businesses.

We represent and advocate for approximately one million people who live across seven municipalities:



What we do

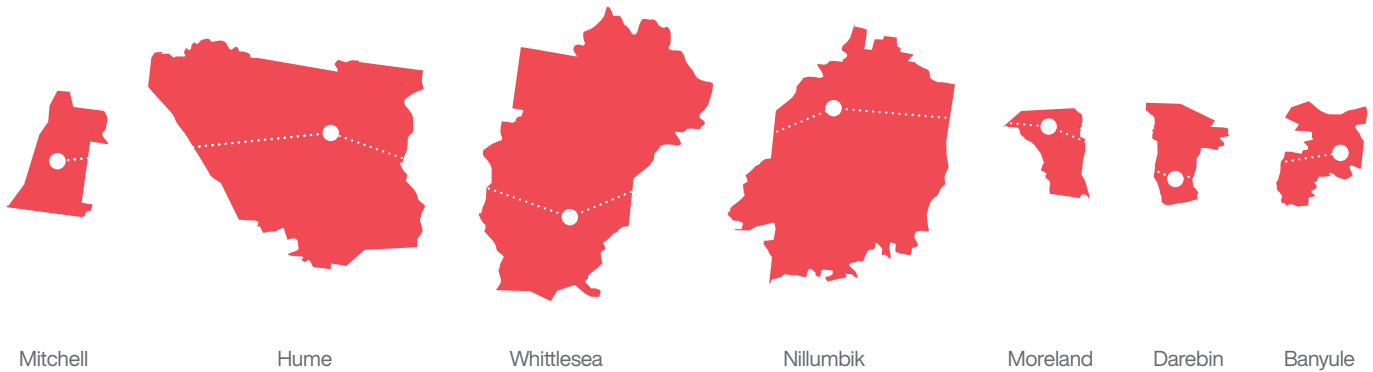
We work as a region to advocate for and deliver ongoing improvements to the economic, social, health and wellbeing of our residents and businesses, both current and future.

We do this by:

- coordinating bipartisan advocacy approaches for key regional strategic priorities
- collaborating on issues of importance to local government
- coordinating regionally-based strategy development
- enhancing partnerships across the region.

Our vision

A vibrant, connected region of seven Councils, where thriving communities contribute to and benefit from a strong, growing and diverse economy.



Our mission

We will ensure a better future for everyone living in Melbourne's north by supporting job opportunities, business investment and connecting our community with employment, health and education services.

Our region

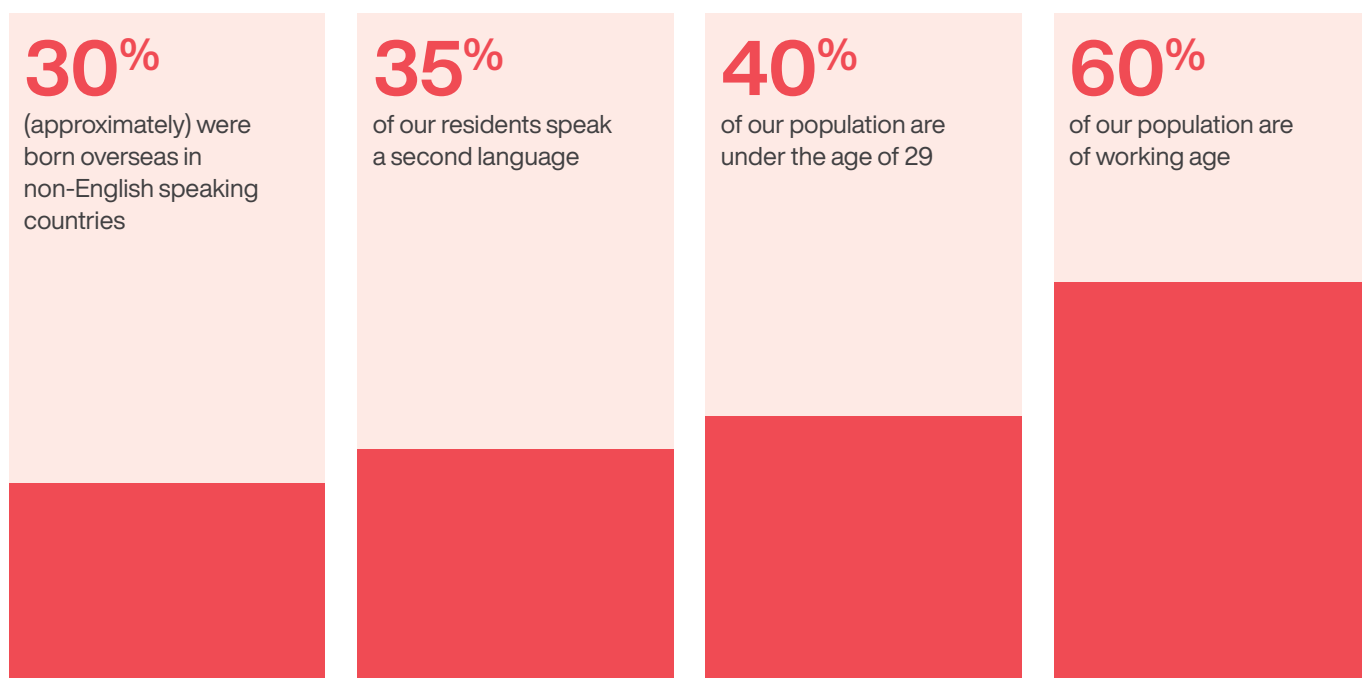
Melbourne's north is:

- an economic powerhouse, producing over **\$40b** worth of goods and services, growing by **4.7** per cent per annum
- a robust and growing local economy with **75,000** local businesses supported by over **360,000** local jobs
- home to over **1 million** residents with annual population growth of **2.8** per cent (compared to the national average of **1.6** per cent).

Our region is growing and changing. Today, we account for over 20 per cent of Melbourne's total population and by 2036 our regional population will be just under 1.5 million people, similar to Adelaide and half a million more than in the region at present.

From our bustling inner suburbs right through to new homes under construction in newly established suburbs, our urban structure has changed over the last 20 years with the expansion of the growth boundary. This presents challenges in terms of transport, jobs, health infrastructure and liveability.

We are known for our diverse population:



Melbourne's north

Current major projects

- 1 North East Link

Planned transformative projects

- Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal
- Broadmeadows Revitalisation
- Melbourne Food Innovation and Export Hub
- La Trobe University City of the Future Redevelopment
- Melbourne Airport Rail
- Melbourne Metro 2
- New Outer North Hospital
- Outer Metropolitan Ring
- E6
- Suburban Rail Loop

Existing key infrastructure

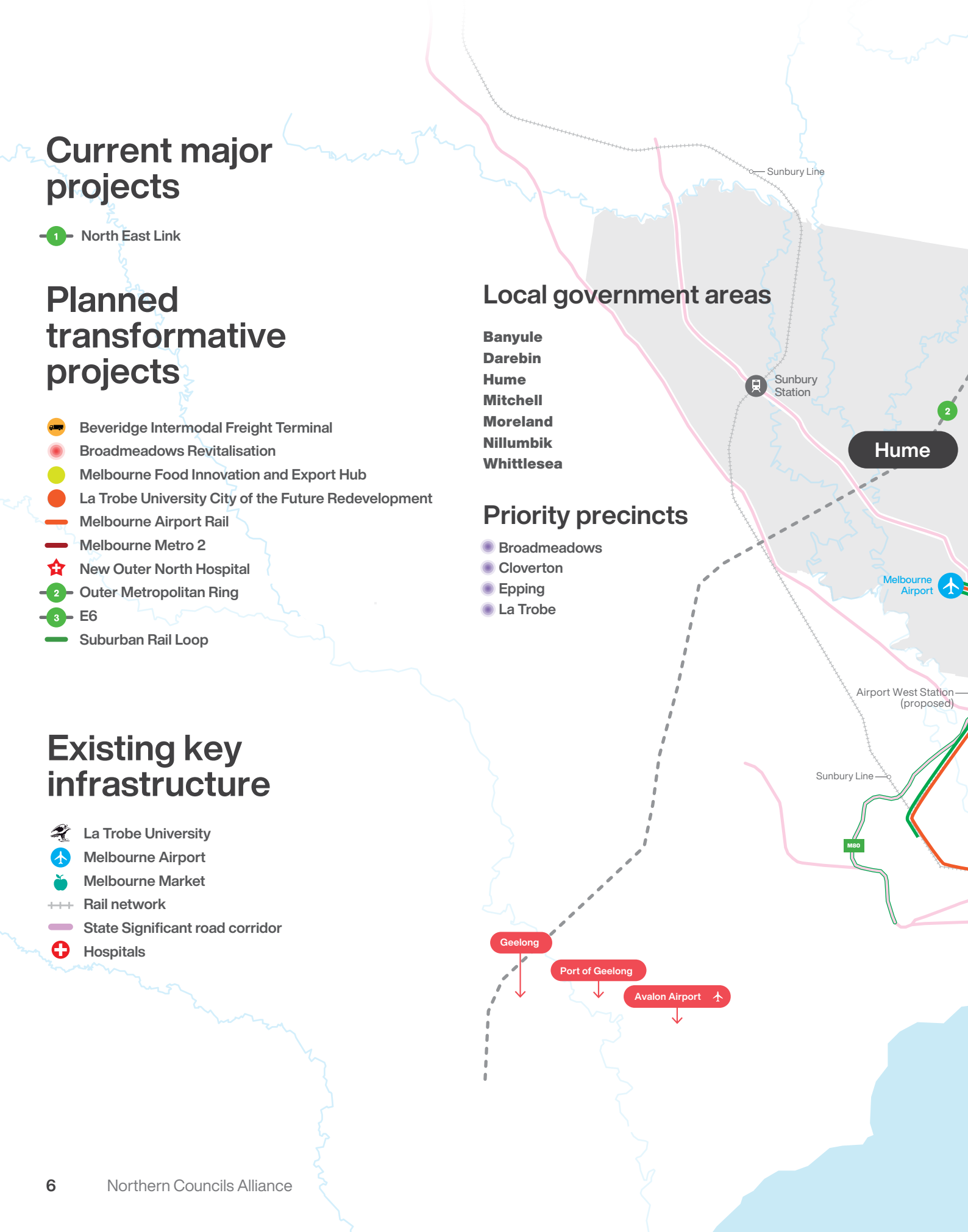
- La Trobe University
- Melbourne Airport
- Melbourne Market
- Rail network
- State Significant road corridor
- Hospitals

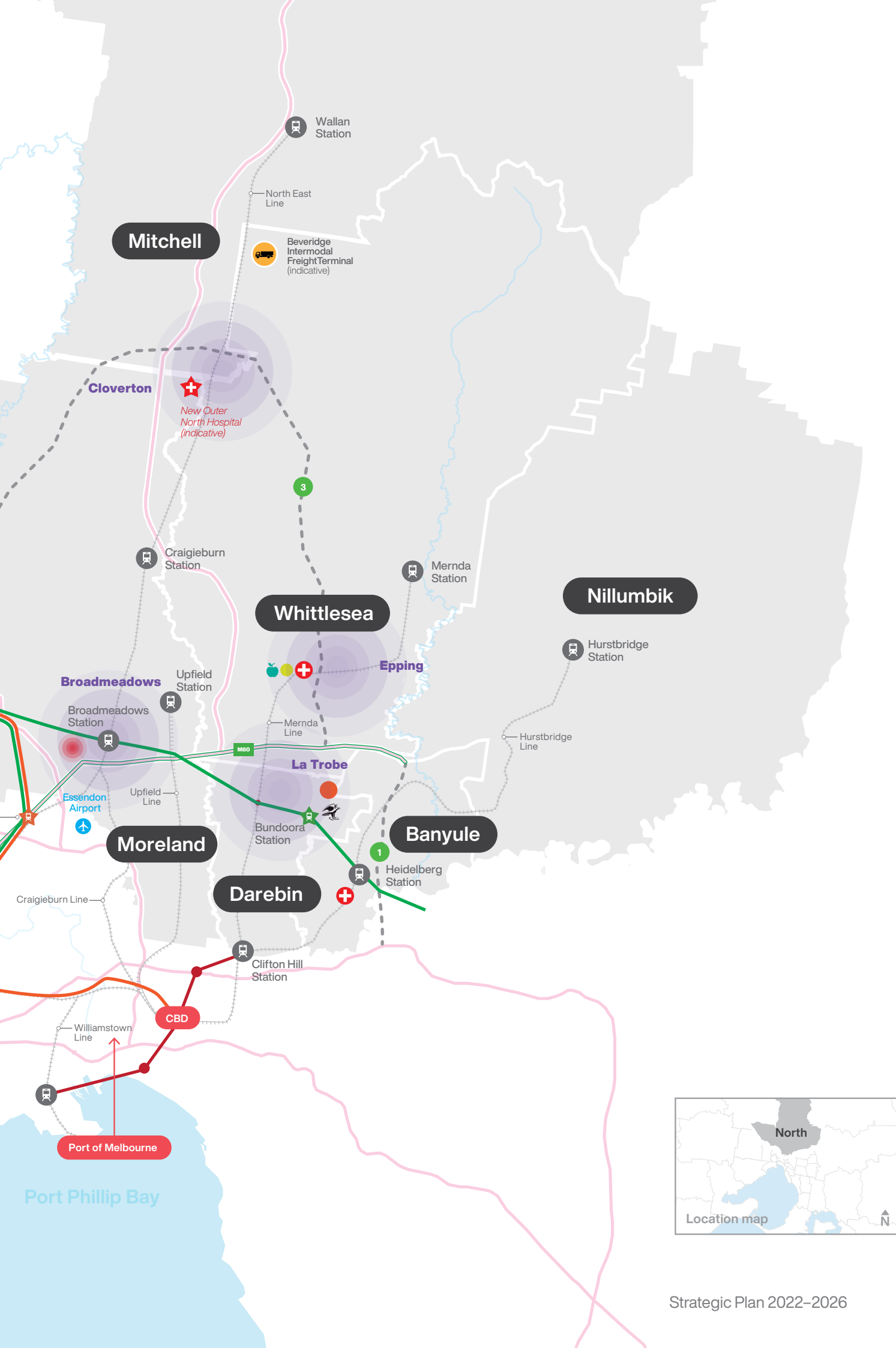
Local government areas

- Banyule
- Darebin
- Hume
- Mitchell
- Moreland
- Nillumbik
- Whittlesea

Priority precincts

- Broadmeadows
- Cloverton
- Epping
- La Trobe



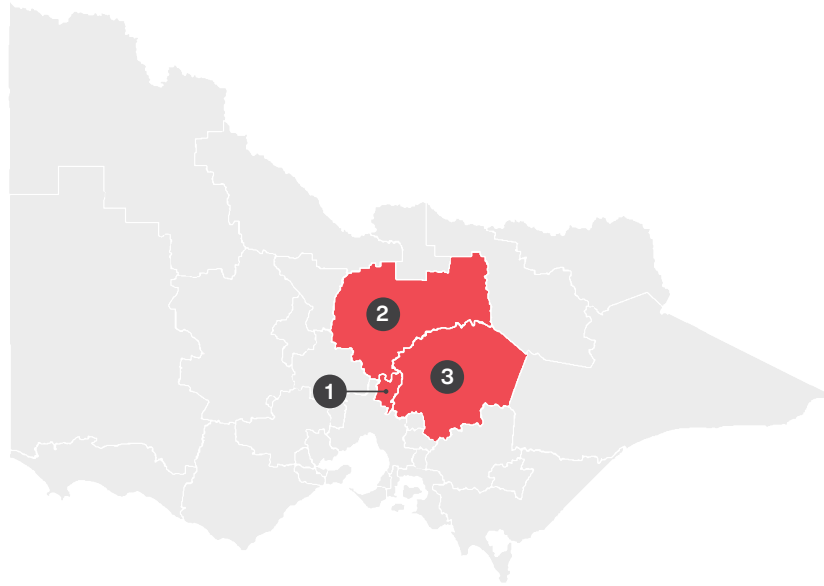


State electoral boundaries

Regional

- 1 Yan Yean
- 2 Euroa
- 3 Eildon

 Not to scale

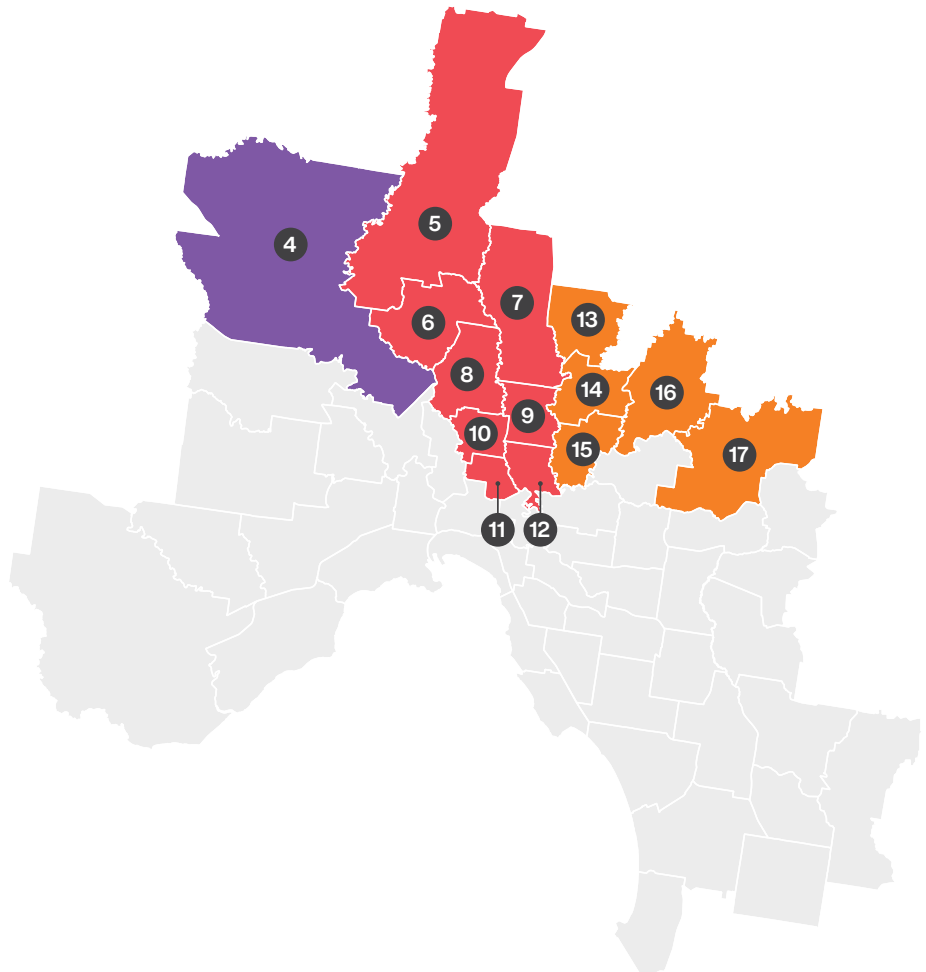


Metropolitan

-  Northern Metropolitan region
-  North-Eastern Metropolitan region
-  Western Metropolitan region

- 4 Sunbury
- 5 Kalkallo
- 6 Greenvale
- 7 Thomastown
- 8 Broadmeadows
- 9 Preston
- 10 Pascoe Vale
- 11 Brunswick
- 12 Northcote
- 13 Mill Park
- 14 Bundoora
- 15 Ivanhoe
- 16 Eltham
- 17 Warrandyte

 Not to scale

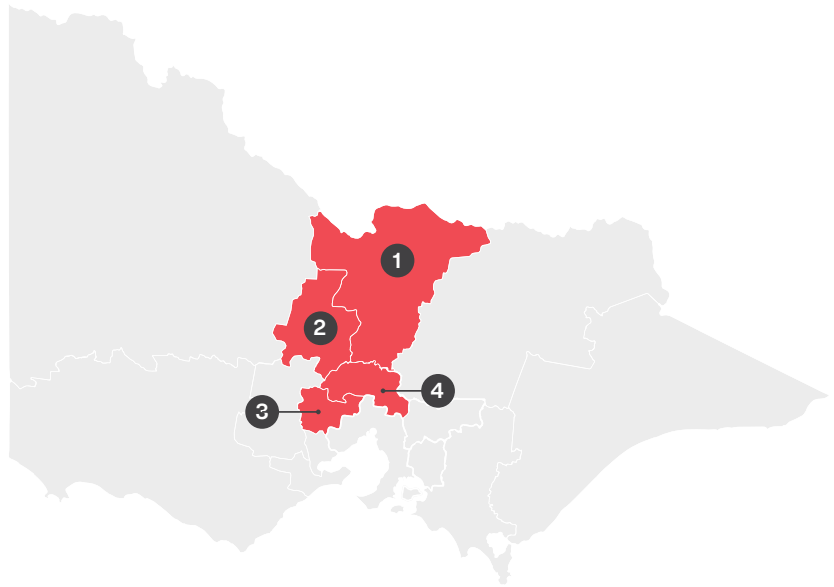


Federal electoral boundaries

Regional

- 1 Nicholls
- 2 Bendigo
- 3 Hawke
- 4 McEwen

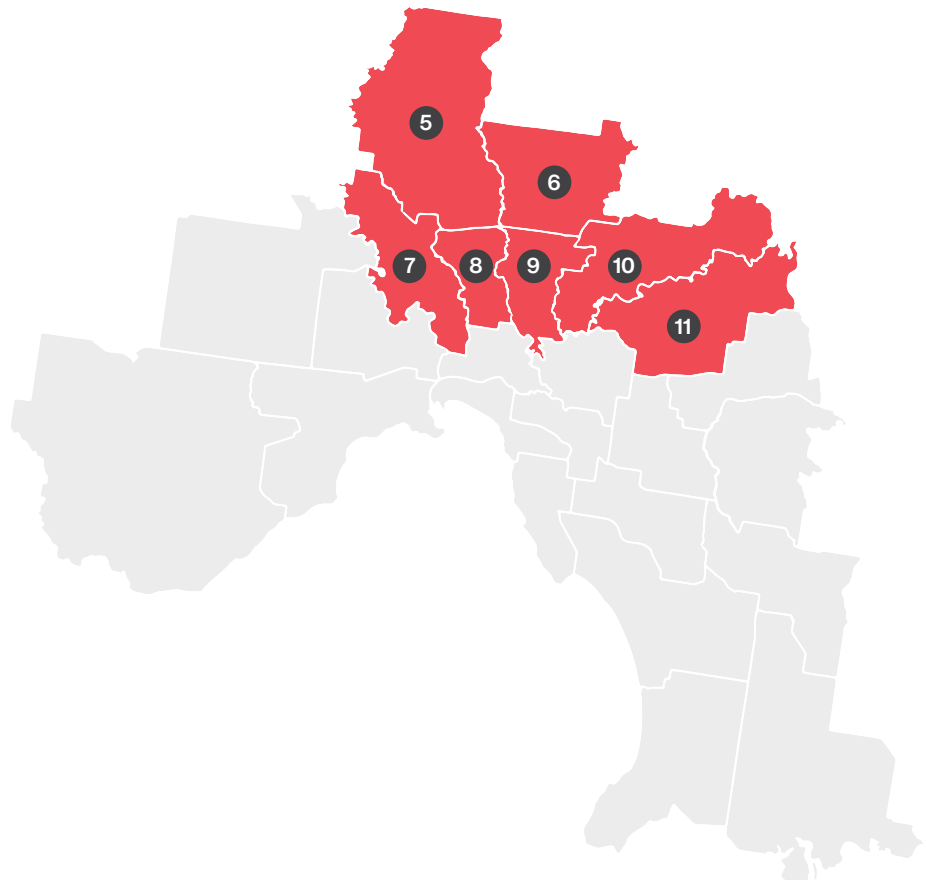
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Metropolitan

- 5 Calwell
- 6 Scullin
- 7 Maribyrnong
- 8 Wills
- 9 Cooper
- 10 Jagajaga
- 11 Menzies

 Not to scale



Our strategic priorities

Over the next four years, we will focus on developing and advocating for four key regional priorities that align with the themes and objectives of our seven Councils.

Priority 1: Transport connectivity and access

*Build and strengthen
transport connectivity
across Melbourne's
north.*



Priority 2: Jobs and skills growth

*Increase jobs for local
residents and attract
employers to Melbourne's
north.*



These priorities are underpinned by comprehensive and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

**Priority 3:
Community
health and
wellbeing**

*Improve community
health and wellbeing
across Melbourne's
north.*



**Priority 4:
Regional
collaboration**

*A commitment to
working collaboratively
across seven Councils
to benefit the region.*



Priority 1: Transport connectivity and access

Our focus

Melbourne's north has high strategic potential, with Melbourne Airport situated in the region and easy access to the Melbourne CBD and the Port of Melbourne. Highway and rail connections link us to the rest of the metropolitan area, country Victoria and interstate capital cities. Yet connectivity remains a challenge.

Melbourne's surging population is a key contributor to road congestion and conflict between modes, which is severe when compared to other regions of Melbourne. It also increases pressure on public transport systems.

Most of our residents drive to work, with only 10.9 per cent of households using public transport daily. Consequently, they face longer than average commute times. Those without cars have limited access to employment across the region. Protracted time spent travelling to the CBD has social and health implications and limited ability to travel between suburbs also results in long commutes.

Electrification of transport will occur over the decade, and it will be critical that our region has the programs and infrastructure in place to successfully navigate this transition.

These issues are set to continue. Most of our region's Councils are experiencing significant population growth either through greenfield development or infill development and densification. Predictions show that the northern growth corridor represents a sizeable proportion of Melbourne's projected growth. By 2036, the regional population is projected to be close to 1.5 million, similar to Adelaide and half a million more than in the region at present.

The *Northern Region Transport Strategy 2020* outlines key challenges, identifies opportunities and provides suggestions for a collaborative approach to action. The NCA will advocate for projects and objectives that have regional impact, are designated regional priorities and align with the goals as identified.

By 2036, the regional population is projected to be close to 1.5 million.



Key issue 1

Congestion limits access between people and jobs

Population growth and need to access jobs puts pressure on the transport network, particularly north–south in our outer areas, while our inner areas continue to experience congestion. We also experience conflicts between users and modes, particularly in the inner north. Ongoing strategic and coordinated planning is needed to ensure that the needs of the community are met by investment in transport infrastructure.

GOAL: Effective management of the impacts of growth

Objective: To advocate for a Victorian Transport Plan developed by the state government that aligns and integrates current strategies and plans, including the Northern Region Transport Strategy.

Key issue 2

Lack of connectivity between key places

Our region lacks east–west connectivity between neighbouring municipalities and centres, especially by public transport but also by road. We face challenges in bringing people from rural and suburban areas to our centres and transport hubs. We also experience uncompetitive public transport travel times compared to car, including poor linkages between services.

GOAL: Creation of a network of strategic places

Objective: To have large scale regional infrastructure identified as priorities funded by state and federal governments.

Key issue 3

Lack of connectivity between people and jobs

As well as a lack of east–west connectivity, we face challenges in bringing people in rural and suburban areas to our centres and transport hubs. This is particularly evident where infrastructure and services are not keeping up with development. Also, access to some industrial and activity areas is difficult using current public transport.

GOAL: Travel choices to jobs and activities

Objective: To undertake feasibility studies on transport network planning, particularly the bus network, and identify cross-regional networks.

Key issue 4

Lack of sustainable transport options across the region

Growing population density and development increases the need for more sustainable transport options. Sustainable transport can achieve better economic integration while protecting the environment, lowering vehicle emissions and promoting healthier lifestyles.

GOAL: A range of sustainable transport projects implemented

Objective: To facilitate development of comprehensive plans that prioritise sustainable transport options and supporting infrastructure to the region, including recreational trails and electric vehicles.

Key issue 5

Need for cohesive collaboration to maximise regional transport outcomes

Regional collaboration is critical in providing a cohesive and efficient transport system across a metropolitan area. Melbourne's north encompasses dense inner-city neighbourhoods, middle suburbs and outer interface areas. Integration is essential to ensure the seamless interconnection of transport modes for all users.

GOAL: Successful advocacy that takes advantage of regional opportunities as they arise

Objective: To harness regional collaboration and continue to seek new opportunities to deliver transport improvements across Melbourne's north.

Priority 2: Jobs and skills growth

Our focus

Melbourne's north is one of Melbourne's most rapidly growing regions, with a current population estimated at 1,077,725 forecast to reach 1.5 million by 2036. With 20 per cent of Melbourne's population living in Melbourne's north, population growth continues to outstrip jobs growth.

It is a region with significant cultural and linguistic diversity, being home to many new arrivals to Australia and with 35 per cent of the population speaking a second language. It is also the metropolitan region with the largest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Most jobs are located in the inner areas, close to the CBD and adjacent to radial transport routes, while most population growth is in the outer areas where infrastructure development and jobs still lag population growth. Today, 60 per cent of the workforce travel outside the region for work.

Despite a strong economic evolution, the number and type of businesses in Melbourne's north have not grown at the rate needed to generate the number of jobs required to keep pace with population growth. And many disadvantaged groups continue to miss out on job opportunities. A lack of regional transport connections means that many residents commute over two hours per day to work.

There is potential for the region to further explore opportunities in the carbon neutral space, including the circular economy, and encourage more investment in manufacturing sustainability.

Key issues emerge that require action from all levels of government, industry and education if our region is to continue to grow and provide opportunities for all its residents. The option to do nothing will have disastrous social and economic effects.

The *Economic Narrative of Melbourne's Northern Metropolitan Region* discussion paper offers background, research and impetus for actions relating to jobs and economic development in the region. The NCA will advocate for projects and objectives that have regional impact, are designated regional priorities and align with the goals as identified.

These key issues include:

- jobs growth needed to match the rate of population growth
- diversity in jobs growth to provide employment across the spectrum of management, professionals, technical and trades, clerical and administrative, sales and customer service
- jobs available where people live including inner, middle and outer north
- improved educational and training opportunities and outcomes to enable local people to obtain local (and other) jobs
- improved access to employment, health and education hubs
- equitable education and employment opportunities
- renewable and circular economy opportunities
- sustainable and liveable communities.

Key issues include opportunities in renewables and the circular economy that will increase sustainability and liveability for our communities.



Key issue 1

Jobs growth to match population growth

As one of the fastest growing regions in Melbourne, and in Australia, Melbourne's north is facing population growth that continues to outstrip jobs growth. Employment opportunities come from setting the right economic conditions, attracting more investment, delivering services and infrastructure, and instilling confidence in the economy. This needs to be a priority for the region.

GOAL: Increased employment opportunities for local residents

Objective: To identify actions and support projects that will grow the number and variety of sustainable jobs available across the region.

Key issue 2

Lack of jobs near home

Rapid growth, especially in outer areas, has exacerbated the issue of long commute times and congestion on roads and on public transport. Support for development of local employment, including major precinct development, would reduce commuter travel across all areas of the region. It would also contribute to liveability, as commute times would reduce.

GOAL: Increased number and range of jobs available across the region

Objective: To support activities and developments that will increase the number of jobs and job diversity across all occupational groups.

Key issue 3

Barriers to participation in the workforce

To boost participation and employment, it is important to acknowledge and address existing barriers that are faced by different cohorts. Barriers can take many forms, and can include mismatch of skills, range of work, and disadvantages such as those experienced by women, older workers, young people, people with disability, Indigenous Australians, and people from migrant or refugee backgrounds.

GOAL: Reduction in barriers to finding work

Objective: To identify actions and support projects that will reduce barriers residents face in finding ongoing, full-time employment.

Key issue 4

Mismatch of skills and employer requirements

In some parts of Melbourne's north there is a mismatch between the demand for skills required by local industry and the skills base and aspirations of its residents. Local tertiary providers have a role to play in offering courses that match local industry needs, and employer connections with educators should be strengthened to maximise positive outcomes.

GOAL: A community with the range of skills and knowledge that local employers need

Objective: To identify and support activities that improve employer-education connections.

Key issue 5

Increased demand for renewables and a circular economy

Expansion of businesses and industries that operate with a sustainability ethos will benefit the whole region. An appropriate long-term response to issues relating to climate change is required, one that meets community expectations. This includes market development for recovered materials, community education campaigns and strengthened industry oversight.

GOAL: Increased use of renewables and development of a circular economy for the region

Objective: To support and encourage promotion and investment in renewables and a circular economy.

Priority 3: Community health and wellbeing

Our focus

Community wellbeing is a broad concept that encompasses physical and mental health, gender equality, climate change, active living and more. Assessment of community health and wellbeing plans across the seven Councils in Melbourne's north resulted in identification of common key issues.

Two priorities stood out as having a direct and immediate impact on health and wellbeing: violence against women/ family violence, and mental health.

The prevention of violence against women, family violence and gender equality have been a major policy focus of the Victorian Government since 2015. Despite this focus, the rate of family violence incidents has increased across many LGAs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within Melbourne's north, the highest LGA rate of incidence is more than three times that of the lowest LGA rate of incidence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in a significant increase in the number of people experiencing mental health issues. The mental health system is under substantial pressure due to increased demand for services and the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health workforce. Young people in particular are increasingly requiring assistance from mental health services. Increasing levels of anxiety are also present in the general community and in specific cohorts such as young people and women.

Two other priorities stood out as requiring sustained action over the longer term: access to services and climate change.

Our region's high levels of diversity and localised disadvantage require advocacy for health and wellbeing services that are available, accessible, affordable, and culturally safe and appropriate. Projected population growth will create significant new demand for general practitioners, allied health providers, specialists and hospitals.

Climate change presents a range of health and wellbeing challenges including direct health impacts (bushfires, heatwaves, floods), indirect health impacts (water and air quality) and social determinants (exposure of housing to heat and cold, economic impacts of climate change). It will have a significant impact on jobs, health and vulnerability, and service transformation will be required.

The *Melbourne's North Community Wellbeing* discussion paper provides context for key issues and an assessment of priorities identified in the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans developed by each Council. The NCA will advocate for projects and objectives that have regional impact, are designated regional priorities and align with the goals as identified.

Community wellbeing is a broad concept that encompasses physical and mental health, gender equality, climate change, active living and more.



Key issue 1

Impact of violence against women/family violence

Violence against women and family violence result in deep and lasting impacts for those affected and the people close to them. Opportunities exist to advocate for increased resourcing for both primary prevention and support services, and for regional, long-term, partnership-based approaches to working with communities in multiple settings to shift the values that enable violence to occur.

GOAL: Strategies that prevent violence against women/family violence

Objective: To advocate for implementation of a range of strategies that address the causes of violence against women/family violence.

Key issue 2

Increase in mental health issues

Government response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System creates new opportunities for Councils to influence the design and commissioning of mental health services, especially in relation to culturally safe and appropriate care, and care for young people. Opportunities also exist for regional collaboration with service providers, government agencies, primary health networks and communities to enhance the impact of primary prevention efforts.

GOAL: Adequate mental health assistance and services provided for the whole community

Objective: To increase the assistance and services available to people experiencing mental health issues, and for prevention programs, across the region.

Key issue 3

Limited access to health and wellbeing services

Policy and investment are required to ensure that all health services are available and accessible as the population continues to grow. Improving access to services must address health equity issues that exist among vulnerable population cohorts. Opportunities also exist for regional collaboration to address modifiable health risks (harmful use of alcohol and other drugs, mental health, sedentary lifestyle) and the determinants of health (homelessness, social isolation) to reduce the incidence of chronic health conditions and mitigate the demand for associated health services.

GOAL: Improved access to health-related services

Objective: To advocate for growth in health and related services to match current and future needs.

Key issue 4

Negative impacts of climate change

Local government is ideally situated to lead place-based and regional efforts that reduce risks in this space. Urban greening is increasingly recognised as beneficial in many ways, from physical and mental health to social inclusion, economic productivity and biodiversity conservation. Development of *A Greener North Action Plan* is one example of a regional initiative that could increase forest cover canopy and reduce the urban heat island effect.

GOAL: A range of projects underway that mitigate the impacts of climate change

Objective: To identify and support key projects that address the negative impacts of climate change and improve/protect the natural environment.

Priority 4: Regional collaboration



Our focus

Contemporary regional planning increasingly focuses on establishing cooperative relationships among local governments and other stakeholders to collaborate on complex challenges.

One of the most impactful things Councils can do to contribute towards community wellbeing and business growth is work on projects that unlock broad benefit. These are the projects that tackle issues or opportunities that are applicable across multiple LGAs.

By working together and leveraging combined resources, Councils can achieve shared goals and create better outcomes for businesses and communities across the region.

Key issue

Need for ongoing collaboration on a regional basis

Many challenges span multiple LGAs. Regional collaboration allows Councils to address issues they would not be able to solve on their own and gain benefits by facilitating activities, communication and advocacy through various networks and projects. Presenting a unified regional voice to state and federal governments also maximises opportunities for the entire region.

GOAL: Collaboration on key projects that address regional need

Objective: To continually collaborate to identify and support key projects that will have significant regional impact.

One of the most impactful things Councils can do to contribute towards community wellbeing and business growth is work on projects that unlock broad benefit.

How we will implement this plan

We will deliver on our strategic priorities by

- advocating to and partnering with state and federal governments
- facilitating actions that are local government responsibilities
- collaborating with our regional partners.

These priorities will be the strategic focus for NCA activities from 2022 to 2026 and timelines will be outlined in our Action Plan.

Throughout the implementation phases we will work in collaboration with our regional partners, utilising the strengths of our member Councils.

As a priority, we will develop and maintain positive relations with key stakeholders including state and federal governments, local Members of Parliament and departmental representatives.

Strategic alignment

We will work to understand issues across our region, engage with our regional partners and develop advocacy and other actions, with reference to the following:

Regional

- *Northern Regional Transport Strategy 2020*
- Councils plans and strategic priorities that were the subject of data analysis and community consultation
- Council priority agenda
- *Building Communities, Connecting People: Northern Horizons 2020*
- *North and West Melbourne City Deal Plan 2020–2040*

Victorian Government

- *Plan Melbourne 2017–50*
- Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy

Australian Government

- Smart Cities Plan
- Infrastructure Australia's *Infrastructure Priority List*
- Smart Cities and Suburbs Program.

Progress of actions

Our Action Plan will outline how our initiatives will be implemented. Progress of actions in the NCA Strategic Plan 2022–2026 will be available at www.northerncouncils.org.au.

Contact us

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