

Advocacy Priorities 2022–2023

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.

About the NCA

As the Northern Councils Alliance, we advocate for projects that will improve services for our residents and businesses.

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

- Banyule City Council
- City of Darebin
- Hume City Council
- Shire of Mitchell
- Moreland City Council
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- City of Whittlesea

This document presents the NCA Advocacy Priorities for 2022–2023.



Melbourne's north: regional overview

At the time of writing, 2021 Census information was unavailable:
see NCA website (www.northerncouncils.org.au) for current stats.

Total population

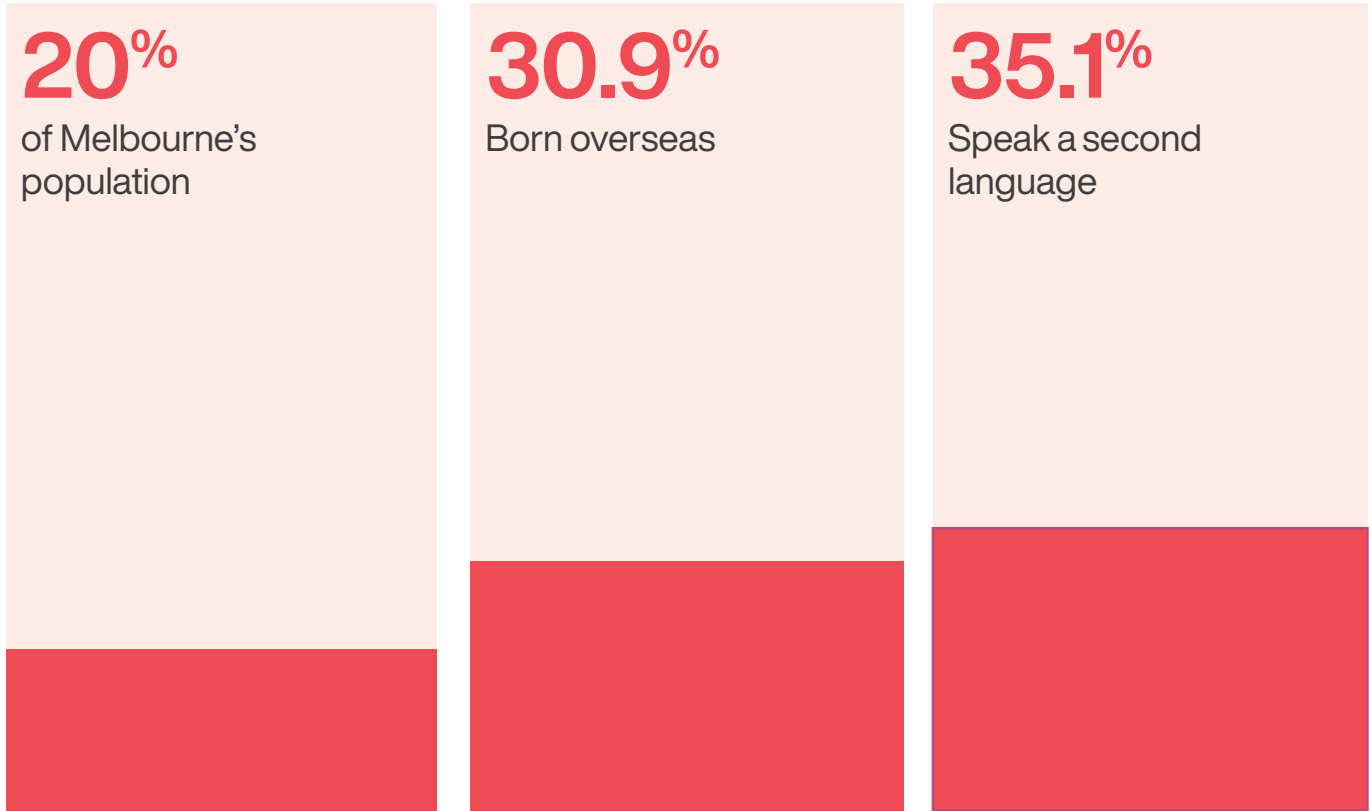
(Profile.id 2020)

1,077,725

Annual growth rate

Total population in 2036

↑2.8% **1,479,399**



Goods and services produced every year

\$40 billion

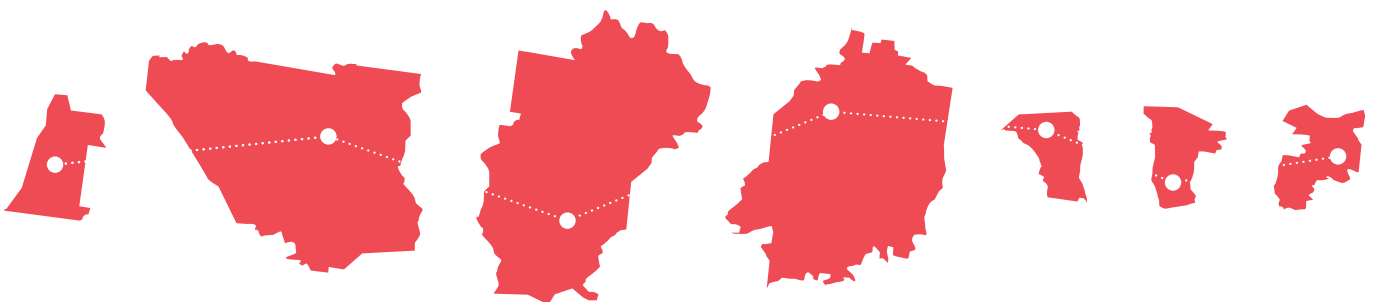
Local businesses

75,000

Local jobs

360,000

Local government areas



Mitchell

Hume

Whittlesea

Nillumbik

Moreland

Darebin

Banyule

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

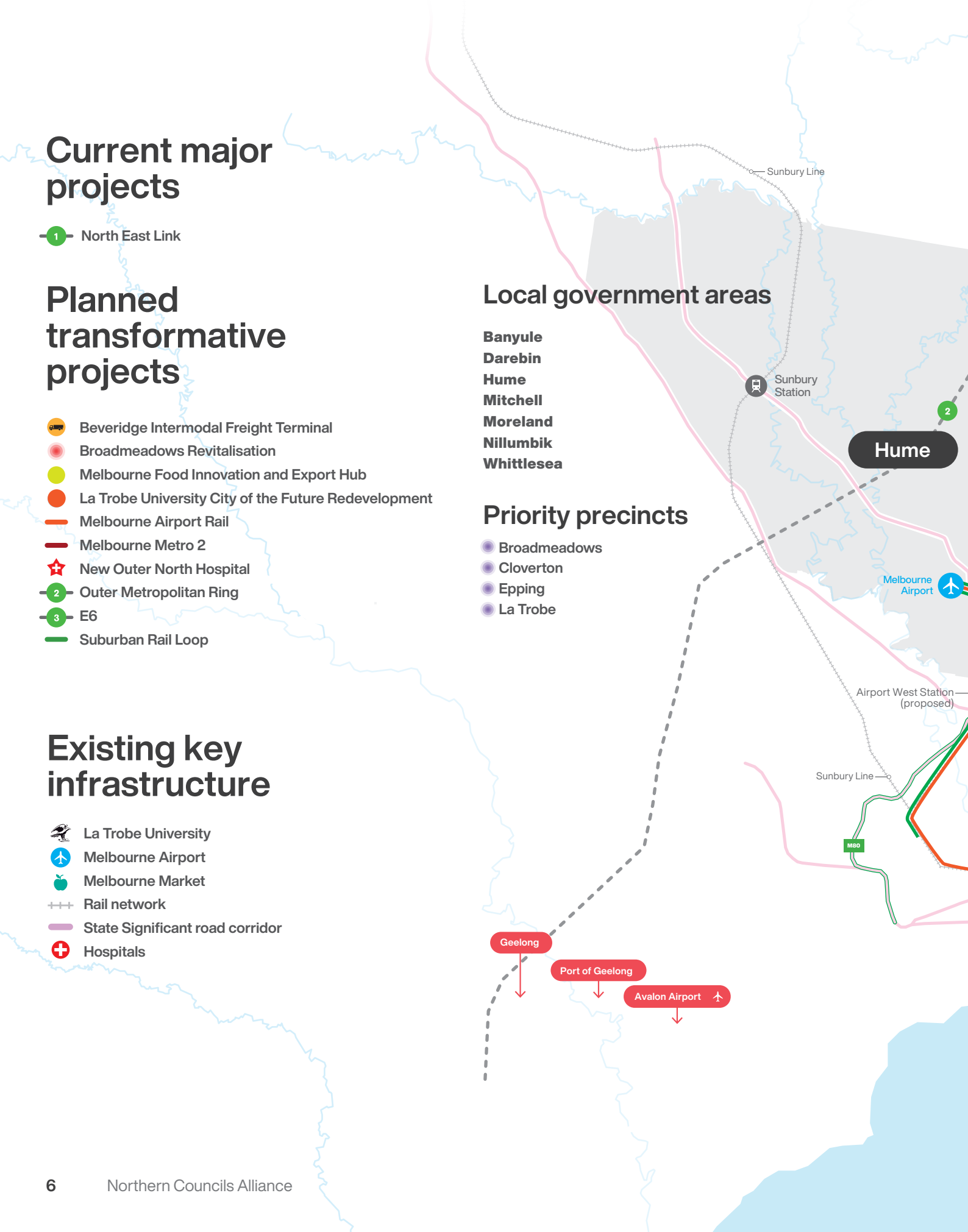
- La Trobe University
- Melbourne Airport
- Melbourne Market
- Rail network
- State Significant road corridor
- Hospitals

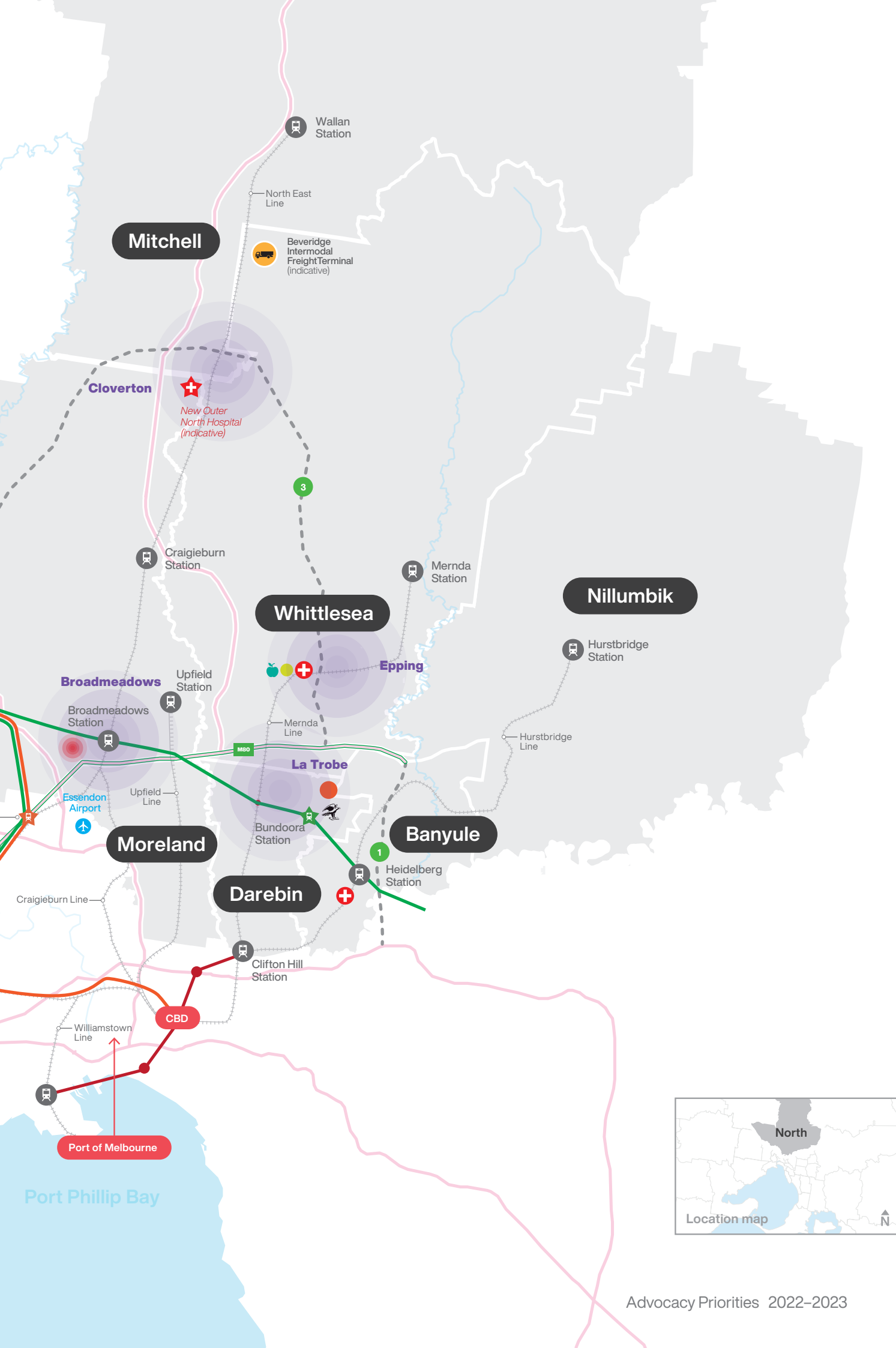
Local government areas

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

Priority precincts

- Broadmeadows
- Cloverton
- Epping
- La Trobe



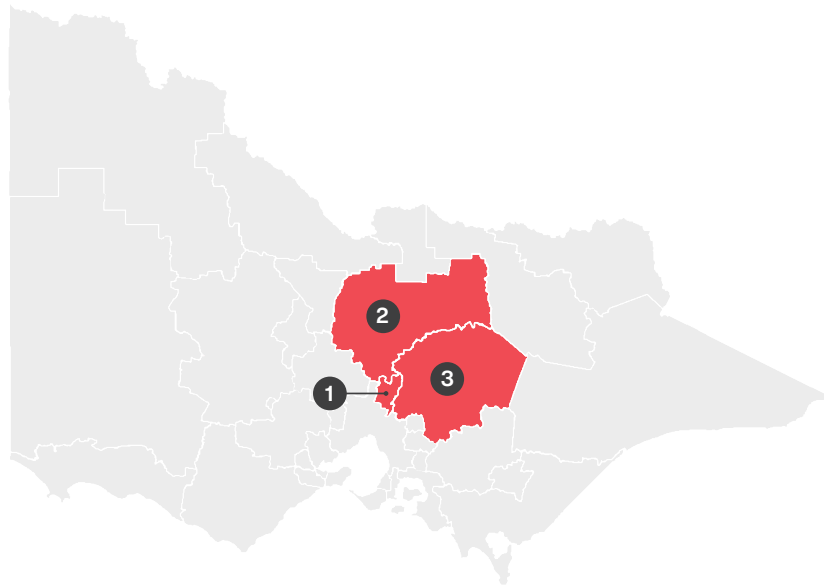


State electoral boundaries

Regional

- 1 Yan Yean
- 2 Euroa
- 3 Eildon

 Not to scale

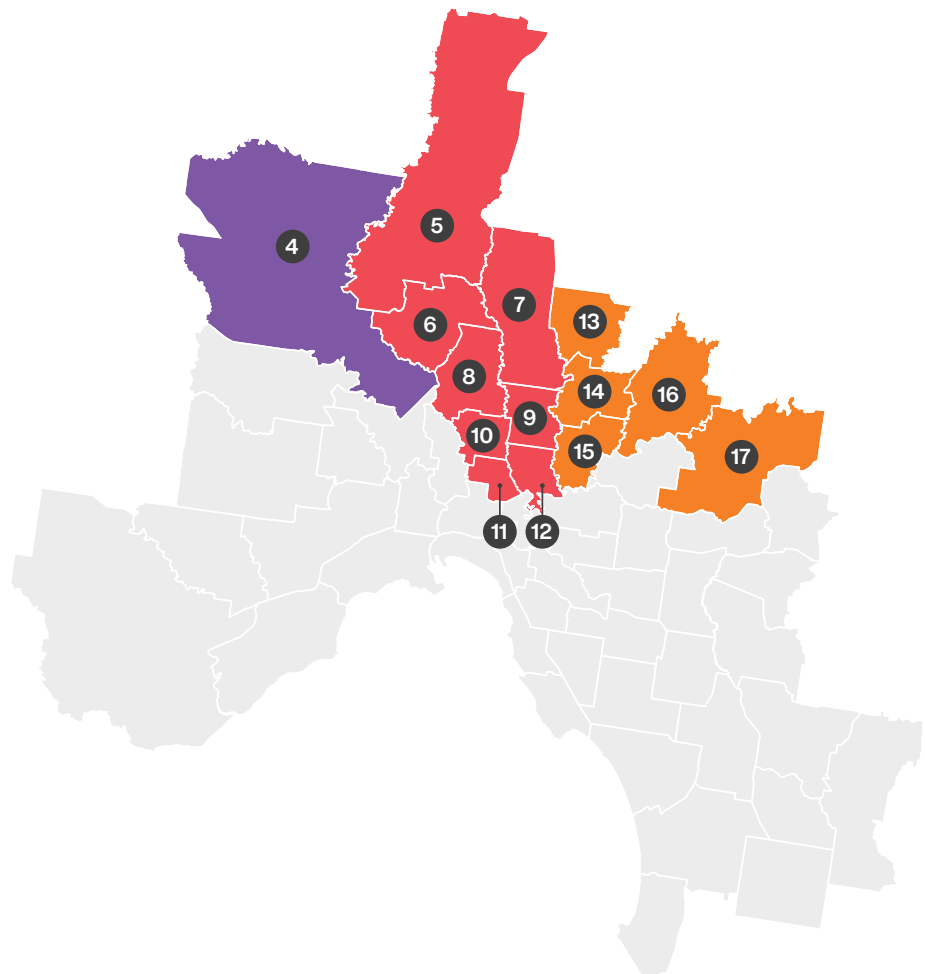


Metropolitan

-  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

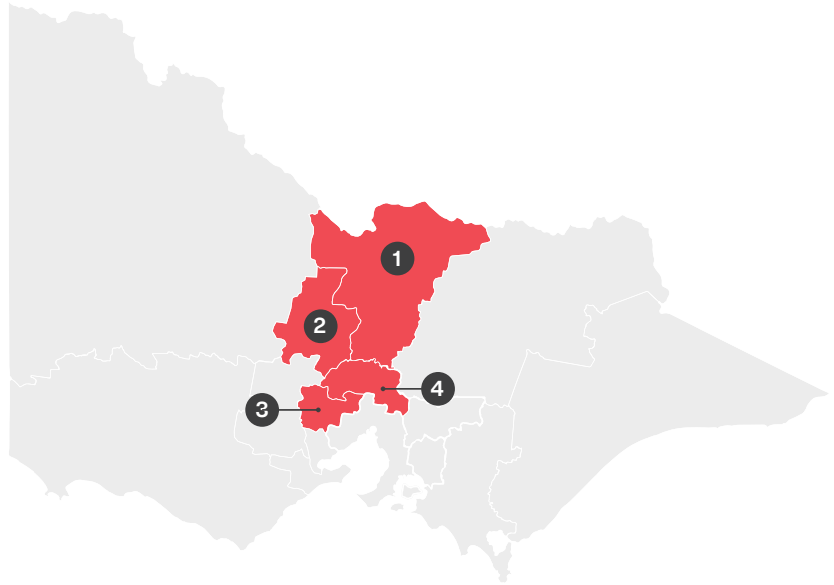


Federal electoral boundaries

Regional

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

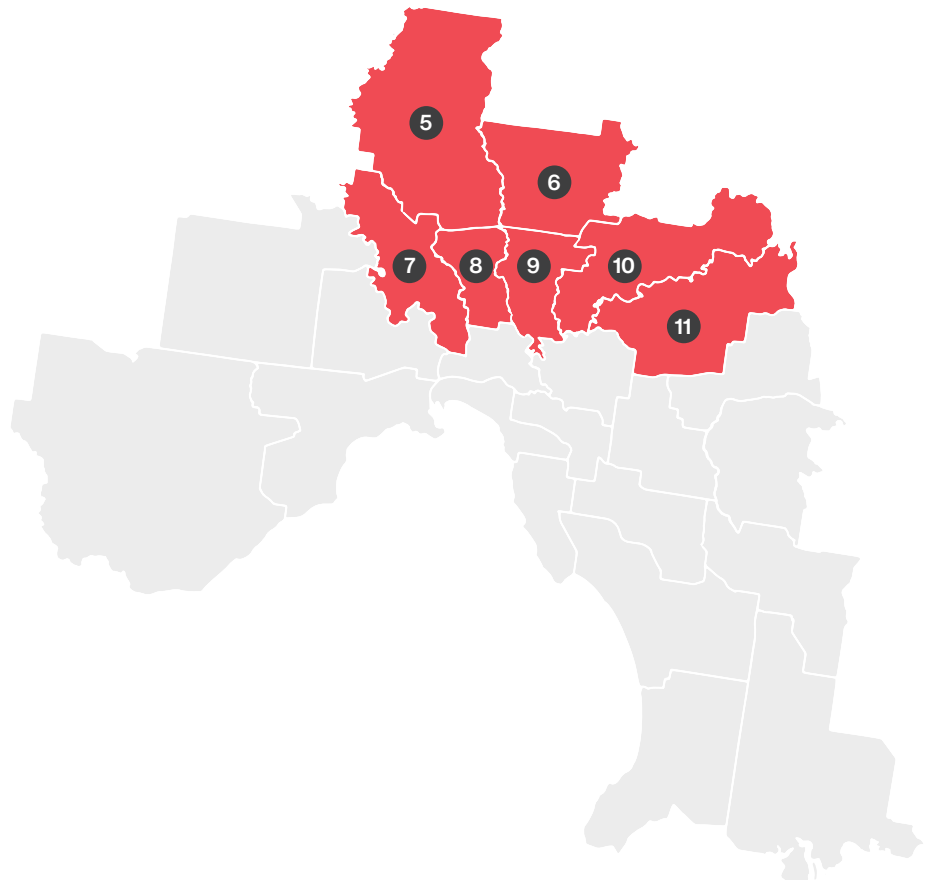
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Metropolitan

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

 Not to scale



Advocacy for strategic priorities

We continue to work on activities related to strategic priority areas as outlined in our *Strategic Plan 2022–2026*.

We will deliver on our strategic priorities by:

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

This document outlines the NCA's advocacy focus for 2022–2023.

Strategic priorities

Priority 1: Transport connectivity and access



Priority 2: Jobs and skills growth



Priority 3: Community health and wellbeing



Priority 4: Regional collaboration



About Melbourne's north

Melbourne's north is a diverse and growing region spanning lively inner communities, historic suburbs and emerging neighbourhoods. Our region has an attractive natural environment, a growing food and beverage industry, robust health and education sectors, and productive industrial precincts.

Linking major industry and businesses, the north comprises integral freight and logistic transit infrastructure such as Melbourne Airport, Tullamarine Freeway and Hume Freeway. The total land area in the region is 167,298 hectares.

Melbourne's north has over one million residents, which is 20 per cent of Melbourne's total population. Our culturally diverse and rapidly growing population is expected to increase by 44 per cent in 2036 to almost 1.5 million. Major growth areas include the outer suburbs along the northern growth corridor.

Importantly, our region has a highly skilled and productive workforce. Key employment sectors include freight and logistics, food production, healthcare and social assistance, and advanced manufacturing. In total, our region currently generates \$40 billion of goods and services each year.

Priority 1: Transport connectivity and access

Regional transport strategy

What we need

Development of a Victorian Transport Plan by the Victorian Government that takes into consideration our *Northern Region Transport Strategy* and *Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks*.

It is vital that our region's transport system can support future growth and jobs while safeguarding and improving livelihood and liveability.

Why

The *Northern Region Transport Strategy* and *Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks* clearly outline investment priorities that will improve public transport connectivity and encourage sustainable transport growth across this region. They identify projects that will better coordinate regional investment and maximise engagement with state and federal governments.

The documents were developed using consensus-based decision making and informed by evidence and analysis. They were designed to align governments and stakeholders in improving the transport network to help fully realise the potential of the region.

Melbourne's north is a large and complex area. It covers the same area as Greater London and is home to 20 per cent of Melbourne's population (pop. one million) and 12 per cent of jobs. As a result, it is vital that this region's transport system can support future growth and jobs while safeguarding and improving livelihood and liveability, and action on the climate emergency/climate action goals of Councils.

In many areas, public transport is unreliable or unavailable and there is poor connection in growth areas. Consequently, a majority of residents drive to their place of employment, leading to ongoing congestion on roads.

Development and publication of a Victorian Transport Plan (as per Recommendation 33: *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051*, Infrastructure Victoria) that takes into consideration the recommendations in the *Northern Region Transport Strategy* will assist the state in addressing key transport challenges for the short and longer term.

Find out more:

- [Northern Region Transport Strategy](#)
- [Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks](#)



Large-scale transport infrastructure

What we need

Approval and funding support for large-scale transport infrastructure investments with significant regional benefits, as identified in our *Northern Horizons* and *North and West Melbourne City Deal Plan 2020–2040* documents.

Key priorities for our region include:

- Upfield Rail Extension: duplication and extension, including electrification; will connect three municipalities, linking outer residents to inner jobs and vice versa, and future-proofing growth in outer suburbs
- Clifton Hill Rail Exchange: will increase capacity on Hurstbridge and Mernda lines, both currently at capacity and expecting future growth
- Wollert Rail Extension: will give residents in the north access to a major health precinct (Northern Hospital)
- Melbourne Metro 2
- OMR/E6.

These are major projects that will provide true connectivity across the region, linking residents to jobs, education and health facilities. It should be noted that each Council has smaller infrastructure requirements that benefit individual municipalities, and these should also be taken into consideration.

Why

The size of Melbourne's north and its rate of population growth demonstrate a large and rapidly increasing requirement for new/upgraded infrastructure and services, from the fast-growing fringe areas to the densifying inner suburbs.

Melbourne's north has been growing at a fast and generally accelerating pace. The current population has placed additional strain on existing infrastructure and created a lag between the need for infrastructure and the investment and delivery of infrastructure. Delivery of priority infrastructure projects will generate the biggest return on investment in terms of economic growth, new jobs and stimulating the economic recovery.

Benefits that accrue from provision of transport infrastructure for households in Melbourne's north include increased travel range, lower transport costs, improved workforce opportunities, access to higher real incomes and safety benefits provided by modern transport infrastructure, particularly improved design of roads, cycle paths and pedestrian walkways. For industry, benefits include reduced costs per vehicle kilometre, improved access to product markets, reduced freight costs, a wider labour catchment, higher productivity from employees, quicker times to market, higher margins or lower pricing opportunities, attraction of new firms and consolidation of industry cluster opportunities, and greater supply chain efficiency. Regional outcomes from transport infrastructure investments include emissions reduction and a greater likelihood of greenhouse gas reductions per capita, greater efficiency in land use outcomes, improved competitiveness, improved workforce integration and skills matching, and greater equity in terms of labour market access.

Find out more:

- [Northern Horizons](#)
- [North and West Melbourne City Deal Plan](#)

Priority 1: Transport connectivity and access (continued)

Improved bus networks across the region

What we need

An efficient network of buses that connect our community to major precincts and health and education facilities. This includes improved services to Melbourne Airport and La Trobe University, improved SmartBus access, increasing services in the northern growth corridor and buses replicating the route of the future Suburban Rail Loop.

Why

A companion piece to the *Northern Region Transport Strategy*, the *Northern Region Transport Study Stage 2: Bus Networks* focuses on strategic improvements to the bus networks. It recommends key actions that will significantly improve connectivity across the region.

A Suburban Rail Loop Bus would provide a continuous, rapid and direct east-west public transport connection from Melbourne Airport to Box Hill, mimicking the proposed alignment of SRL north stations.

A realignment of SmartBus services, in particular one that terminates at Melbourne Airport, would improve access to jobs, education and health services, as well as maximise patronage and connectivity.

La Trobe University is poorly served by public transport compared to other universities. The university is planning significant growth with a private sector partner and this needs to be provided for with improved public transport. Lowering the need to drive to campus would reduce congestion in connecting roads across the region.

Melbourne Airport and the surrounding business park is a key employment hub in the north, with over 20,000 employees. Existing public transport services do not meet the needs of shift workers, as many businesses operate 24/7. Public transport improvements are urgently required to improve employee access.

Our northern growth corridor needs extra investment. For example, Wallan and Beveridge (Mitchell Shire) will house over 200,000 people by 2051. This growth will create a jobs deficit, requiring residents to travel 10 km to 25 km to access jobs and services. If these trips are by car, the Hume Highway will be overwhelmed. Direct public transport connections to key employment areas in the region are needed.



Pilot funding for electric vehicles

What we need

Support for the ongoing delivery of our community-wide electric vehicle transition plan and council fleet transition plans currently under development – particularly financially supporting grid connection and grid stability upgrades for our Council depots, offices and community facilities.

Why

Electric vehicles, including personal e-mobility devices, are important to help communities transition to lower carbon lifestyles. In 2021, the Victorian Government released *Victoria's Zero Emissions Vehicle Roadmap* to drive uptake of electronic vehicle infrastructure across the state. This included initial investment to support public charging infrastructure, with more expected in coming years. The government is aware that within the community, there is a need for chargers at key locations such as train stations and activity centres. At a community level, it is anticipated that charging of electric vehicles would be done from home. However, it is unclear how this will occur for people with additional barriers such as renters and within certain houses and development types (for example, apartments, medium density sites, properties without off-street parking.)

The NCA is currently undertaking a community-wide electric vehicle transition plan. Government support for implementation of recommendations will be required.

Electric vehicles are important to help communities transition to lower carbon lifestyles.

Priority 1: Transport connectivity and access (continued)

Liveability funding for northern trails

What we need

A 10-year pipeline of funding (estimated \$110 million) to complete all stages of our Northern Trails project, including delivery, which will:

- ensure a holistic approach to the planning, design and delivery of the regional network of trails in a transparent, fair and coordinated way
- include all phases of the trail projects including advocacy, planning, design, construction, delivery and ongoing maintenance
- fully support the *Northern Trails 2022* strategy, which establishes a framework for the delivery of this network of trails for the next 10 years and beyond.

Why

Northern Trails 2022 establishes a framework for the planning and development of regional trails in Melbourne's north. It documents a realistic planning framework and implementable action plan to establish a high-quality network of integrated and connected shared trails sensitively linking communities, destinations and a diverse range of urban and natural environments. The regional trail network will provide desirable, safe and accessible transport and recreation opportunities for residents and collectively reinforce the region as a world-class trails destination for visitors. The strategy focuses on 'regional trails', which are higher order trails that have a regional scale, purpose and/or impact. It should also be noted that each Council will have its own priorities relating to local trails.

Northern Trails 2022 primarily covers paths for walking and cycling, but also includes bridle paths. Many of the proposed paths connect and extend existing paths, significantly multiplying their benefits. A pool of ongoing funding would maximise benefits, as this is a 10-year plus plan that has the potential to be region-changing.

A Cost Benefit Analysis was undertaken as a part of the strategy to quantify the economic benefits of regional trail investment. The analysis highlights that the Northern Trails upgrade is expected to generate a net present value of around \$114 million and a benefit cost ratio of 1.6. This indicates that benefits directly attributable to the project will be around 1.6 times that of the investment.

Priority 2: Jobs and skills growth



Develop precincts

What we need

The Victorian Government to recognise and support growth in our region's four major precincts (La Trobe, Broadmeadows, Epping, Cloverton) and two minor precincts (Beveridge, Inner North), facilitating growth through industry, education and health by:

- producing a final framework for each precinct
- creating a dedicated delivery agency supported by a formal governance model to oversee the successful implementation of the framework and investment in coordination
- providing a dedicated pipeline of funding for projects
- enabling supporting infrastructure to unlock access to industrial land for future employment precincts.

Why

Urban clusters are crucial for economic development and productivity growth in the knowledge economy, and clusters need economic density for productivity. *Plan Melbourne 2017–2050* recognises this significance and is strongly grounded in terms of cluster/precinct development.

Plan Melbourne shows key areas of Melbourne's north that are significant and represent regional competitive strengths, recognising the region's strengths and opportunities for cluster development. Relevant regional clusters are location based (including the La Trobe NEIC, Melbourne Airport and several other activity centres), and industry based clusters (for example, food and beverage, health). Development of these locations as employment, industry and activity precincts, linking to health and education facilities, will be essential in terms of future regional development. Efficient connectivity will be key to their success and there should be a focus on sustainability.

Development of these key precincts will support individual Council plans, which will ensure cohesiveness and connectivity for communities across the region. It will increase local job generation and raise productivity levels.

If these important precincts across Melbourne's north are not developed, there will be significant negative economic and social impacts. Land not utilised appropriately, local government not supported, health services unconnected and ad hoc industry attraction and sustainability will mean significant opportunities are lost. Designating these priority precincts, engaging with industry and attracting these services in a cohesive and planned way with government support will mean better services for communities.

Find out more:

→ [Northern Horizons](#)

→ [North and West Melbourne City Deal Plan](#)

Priority 2: Jobs and skills growth (continued)

Inclusive employment program

What we need

Funding of \$13.6 million over four years to roll out Banyule's highly successful and federal and state award-winning Inclusive Employment Program to all Councils in our region.

The first of its kind in local government, the program provides place-based inclusive employment outcomes for local people experiencing barriers to employment, with a focus on target community groups that are underrepresented in the labour market. It offers a six-month job opportunity in a paid role tailored to an individual's areas of interest, goals, strengths and ability. Participants gain local government experience and are provided with tailored coaching and development opportunities to help build their core skills for work and networks. Each year, this funding will provide 56 local people with genuine local job opportunities – eight people per Council per year.

Rolling this project out across our region will drive meaningful and inclusive job creation outcomes – enabling 112+ local jobs for local people experiencing barriers to employment per year, and a total of 336+ inclusive employment outcomes over a four-year period. Additionally, eight new local jobs will be created.

Why

Localised unemployment among vulnerable community groups is an issue across local government areas. Melbourne's north has pockets of high disadvantage that sit well below the state average. Many vulnerable community groups are underrepresented in the labour market and they face numerous barriers to full participation, placing them at greater risk of economic and social exclusion.

Councils have an opportunity to harness their role as a major employer and facilitator of an inclusive economy so that all local people can benefit from ongoing employment and the social benefits of workplace interaction.

Importantly, this program was co-designed with community, adopts a place-based approach and is aligned with the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* to help reduce localised unemployment for disadvantaged groups and support equitable access to employment. Based on a successful pilot run by Banyule City Council with evidenced impact, this project allows Councils to role model the change that needs to happen across workplaces for them to become truly inclusive and diverse.

Rolling this project out across the region will drive meaningful and inclusive job creation outcomes for local people.

Priority 3: Community health and wellbeing



Mental health and wellbeing support

What we need

Funding and services to improve and support mental health and wellbeing, and an increased focus on mental health prevention across our region.

This can be achieved by funding local government to engage in mental wellbeing activities, committing to local government representation on key governance structures and in planning processes relating to promotion and prevention, better recognition and funding for the promotion and prevention work already occurring in local government, resourcing local government to strengthen data collection and research evidence, and improving the availability of local mental healthcare services.

Why

Increasing mental wellbeing is an important priority of all local governments. Despite increasing investment in services, the prevalence of mental health conditions in Melbourne's north (and in Australia generally) is rising, services struggle with demand and workforce shortages, and costs to individuals, governments and society are escalating. The COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters have made this crisis worse.

At the same time, service systems in Melbourne's north are already stretched. The Northern Hospital is at capacity, and projected population growth in the region will create significant new demand for all health services. The high level of diversity and disadvantage across Melbourne's north requires advocacy to ensure that mental health and wellbeing services are available, accessible, affordable, and culturally safe and appropriate.

Melbourne's north should be a priority area for establishment of new mental healthcare initiatives, such as child and family mental health hubs and local mental health services. Local wellbeing support and other community services are also needed to support people living with mental health challenges.

Along with increased investment in and improvements to mental health services in Melbourne's north there is a need to increase investment in local government mental health prevention and promotion activities. A partnership approach between all levels of government is required where data collection, research evidence and best practice approaches inform improved coordination and service delivery across the mental health and wellbeing continuum, from prevention and early intervention to crisis responses and treatment.

Priority 3: Community health and wellbeing (continued)

Increased access to health services

What we need

A new public hospital in Melbourne's north to cater for the growing population and increasing health needs in our community, providing emergency care with provision for specialist services such as oncology, maternal, neonatal and paediatric services.

Public hospitals in the region are at capacity and a new major public hospital is required to address high demand.

Why

The major public hospitals within the north (Northern Hospital in Epping and Austin/Mercy in Heidelberg) are at capacity. The Northern Hospital in particular is undergoing significant pressure from the continued population growth and demand in the outer northern area. The public and private hospital beds available to residents of the north are well below the standards of provision for the east, west and south, and a new major public hospital is required in the short term to address high demand.

Plan Melbourne promotes a range of planning responses to improve the provision of health services and facilities. Specific actions related to planning for health include creating neighbourhoods and communities that support healthy lifestyles and creating health precincts to meet the needs of residents across Melbourne.

Current health services available in the north will not be able to respond to the needs of our growing population. As noted in the *Hume North Growth Corridor Health Infrastructure Plan*, it is anticipated that the new and emerging communities will include high numbers of refugee and asylum seeker families, families with early years and youth aged children, and single parent households. Often these are families with limited transport opportunities, emphasising the need for transport infrastructure that links to health and other services.

The new hospital could then be leveraged to expand current allied and mental health services in the outer north.

A new hospital in the north will attract commercial investments – in allied services, health, education and training, and related businesses. It will contribute significantly to the local economy in an area of high growth, and provide a significant number of jobs, both during construction and in ongoing roles across a range of employment categories. Building a new hospital is necessary and will bring long-term benefit to a fast-growing community.



Ending family violence

What we need

Better support to end family violence in our communities and increase early intervention to support children and young people's wellbeing, including:

- commitment to improving the service system in each of Council area through investment, integration and collaboration
- commitment to four years of funding to establish a Northern Councils Violence-Free Team to strengthen, streamline and co-design early intervention programs, men's change management, multi-agency risk assessment and pathways for the region
- commitment to four years of funding to deliver Gender Equity Action Plans and Gender Impact Assessments.

Why

Councils in Melbourne's north are united in addressing the underlying drivers of family violence. Family violence is preventable, and local government is calling on increased support to better support communities. Melbourne's north records unacceptably high levels of family violence with two Councils (Mitchell and Hume) above state incident rates. For the 12-month period ending March 2022, police attended 13,126 incidents of family violence in Melbourne's north.

Our Watch, the national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, confirms there is an explicit link between levels of family violence and lack of gender equity. Addressing gender inequity presents many opportunities to improve relative and systematic disadvantage and create system change for the current and next generation.

Councils are committed to the goals of gender equity and reducing family violence and have all endorsed Gender Equality Action Plans, with significant work to progress the Gender Impact Assessments now required. These are the keystone to breaking the cycle of structural and systemic discrimination and gender inequality that drives violence against women and children. This work will also support diversity and inclusion for communities and requires adequate funding to progress.

Building community resilience, particularly in new and emerging communities, is important for liveability and connectedness. Growth areas also require substantial support in establishing physical, social and economic facilities to support families. Urgent investment across Melbourne's north is needed in early intervention initiatives to change the landscape, support women and families to remain safe in the community and put an end to the deep and lasting impacts on those affected by family violence. This includes strengthening the focus on children and young people's wellbeing. Each Council, through its own advocacy, has also identified priority services that will support local communities.

Priority 3: Community health and wellbeing (continued)

Support for a greener north

What we need

Victorian Government support to meet canopy cover and biodiversity targets set within the *Plan Melbourne: Northern Metro Land Use Framework Plan*.

A funding injection of \$25 million per year for four years will facilitate a greener and healthier north. This funding will support the delivery of canopy justice plans in areas of high community vulnerability, street and park tree planting programs, and on-ground biodiversity actions along important waterways. It will facilitate regional project collaboration, including the development of artificial intelligence tools to help understand and plan for future canopy. It will also support regional collaboration for urban greening, and amplify existing Council budgets for greening.

In addition to providing direct funding, commitment is required to reducing the significant planning and policy barriers that impact Councils' ability to achieve greening.

Why

The *Living Melbourne* strategy notes that tree canopy cover in Melbourne's north is the second lowest of any region in metropolitan Melbourne. This means the community is missing out on the substantial benefits of urban greening.

Urban greening is a way to help mitigate the negative effects of climate change across Melbourne's north. Importantly, this project would necessarily engage a diverse range of stakeholders from the region, including Traditional Owners, water authorities and conservation organisations as well as Councils, to maximise outcomes.

Councils own and manage a significant portion of the canopy cover within Melbourne's north and are well placed to implement urban greening, both on land they own and via establishing partnerships with private landowners. For Melbourne's north to meet the targets outlined in the *Northern Metro Land Use Framework Plan*, funding and resourcing for the implementation of *Living Melbourne* and the *Greening the North* program is required.

Urban greening is a way to help mitigate the negative effects of climate change across Melbourne's north.

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