



Infrastructure Victoria Victoria's Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy

March 2021

Executive Summary

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to respond to Victoria's Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy.

Long-term planning around Victoria's infrastructure needs is crucial to the State's future prosperity. While this has always been the case, it has become even clearer in the context of the global pandemic. World-class infrastructure has been essential to Victoria's public health response to the pandemic, and will continue to play a key role in the rollout of the mass vaccination program. Equally, how well Victoria navigates a COVID-19 recovery will significantly depend upon the extent to which infrastructure is maintained and updated. Infrastructure Victoria is to be commended for the breadth and detail in the Draft Strategy, and for the consultative approach in allowing an extended period for stakeholder comment.

The comments below note some areas where we argue that the Strategy could be strengthened, relating to Fishermans Bend transport links, research infrastructure and the Free Tram Zone. Notwithstanding these areas, the University of Melbourne supports the direction set out in the Draft Strategy. We welcome the recognition of the role of infrastructure in supporting energy transition and in the development of regional Victoria. It is also pleasing that the Draft Strategy includes a bold plan for updating Melbourne's transport infrastructure.

The following comments focus on three aspects of the Strategy:

Fishermans Bend transport links

The Draft Strategy proposes significant upgrades to the transport links to Fishermans Bend, including the northern Fishermans Bend tram connection, and the completion of the business case for Melbourne Metro Two. The University of Melbourne strongly supports these proposals.

Free Tram Zone

The Draft Strategy proposes abolishing the Free Tram Zone. The University of Melbourne opposes this, and recommends extending the Free Tram Zone to better promote the intended benefits.

Research infrastructure

Research infrastructure is notably absent from the Draft Strategy. Measures targeting maintenance of and upgrades to the State's research infrastructure should be included in the Strategy, given its importance to research performance and to Victoria's economic and social wellbeing.

Recommendations

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Infrastructure Strategy should:

- *Include funding for the northern Fishermans Bend tram connection for delivery by 2026, as recommended in the Draft Strategy.*
- *Support preparations for Melbourne Metro Two, including completing the business case within five years, as recommended in the Draft Strategy.*
- *Not include the abolition of the Free Tram Zone; and*
- *Expand the Free Tram Zone to encompass the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct and Arts precinct, to enhance student accessibility and experience and to promote the broader benefits generated by the Zone.*
- *Allow international students access to the public transport ticket discounts available to domestic students, to support those students who have remained in Victoria during the pandemic, and to help rebuild the international education market once travel restrictions are lifted.*
- *Recognise the importance of building and maintaining research infrastructure, given its role in supporting the objectives identified in the Draft Strategy.*

For further information or to discuss this submission, Mr Allan Tait, Vice-President Administration & Finance and Chief Operating Officer, can be contacted on (03) 8344 6137 or atait@unimelb.edu.au.

Fishermans Bend transport links

The Draft Strategy includes two recommendations for upgrading the transport links between the new Fishermans Bend precinct and the CBD:

- Activate urban renewal with new trams links, including immediate funding for the northern Fishermans Bend tram connection for delivery by 2026 (Recommendation 43).
- Prepare for the Melbourne Metro Two, including completing the business case within the five years and introducing premium bus services between Newport and Fishermans Bend, and between Victoria Park and Parkville (Recommendation 66).

The University of Melbourne strongly supports these recommendations. Fishermans Bend represents a rare opportunity to establish a major residential, business and innovation district in close proximity to Melbourne's CBD. The success of the Fishermans Bend district will depend upon it being adequately connected to the broader public transport network. Immediate work on new tram links between the CBD is an important step in building these connections. Connecting Fishermans Bend to Melbourne's train network through Melbourne Metro Two should be seen a major transport infrastructure priority. Melbourne Metro Two would significantly reduce travel time between Fishermans Bend and the CBD, and it would help attract investment, businesses and residents to the area. The Draft Strategy is to be commended for identifying the next steps in planning for the extension of Melbourne Metro.

Recommendation

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Infrastructure Strategy should:

- *Include funding for the northern Fishermans Bend tram connection for delivery by 2026, as recommended in the Draft Strategy.*
- *Support preparations for Melbourne Metro Two, including completing the business case within five years, as recommended in the Draft Strategy.*

Free Tram Zone

The Draft Strategy recommends abolishing the free tram zone (Recommendation 47), arguing that this would improve accessibility for travel within the CBD.

The University of Melbourne strongly opposes this measure. Rather than end the free tram zone, we argue that the zone should be expanded to better promote the benefits it is intended to generate. Extending the tram zone along Swanston Street and Royal Parade to the north so that it includes the University of Melbourne's Parkville campus and the Melbourne Bio-medical precinct, and to the south so that it includes the National Gallery of Victoria and Arts Centre Melbourne would achieve this. An extended free tram zone would support (rather than undermine) accessibility, and would add to the social and economic value generated by Melbourne's CBD and hospital precinct.

Student experience and accessibility

An extended free tram zone would enhance the study experience for those enrolled at a campus in and around the CBD, as well improving accessibility for those students. Many students, particularly those from Indigenous and low socioeconomic backgrounds, struggle to meet the costs associated with travel to and from university. Given the large numbers of students residing in and around the CBD and commuting within the area for study, a wider free tram zone would help reduce the cost of study and support access for those students. This would also considerably enhance the student experience, by better connecting Melbourne's inner-city campuses with each other and with amenities in the CBD.

Maximising the benefits of the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct and Innovation Precinct

The Melbourne Biomedical Precinct and the soon-to-be launched Melbourne Connect innovation precinct are key parts of Victoria's research and innovation ecosystem, and will support the State's COVID economic recovery. The performance of research and innovation precincts depends upon co-location: a core function of these precincts is to place researchers and research-intensive institutions in proximity to each other and to relevant contacts in businesses and Government. An extended tram zone that includes Parkville would better connect the Biomedical Precinct and Melbourne Connect with the CBD, thereby increasing the potential health, social and economic value these precincts deliver.

International students

In 2019, more than 62,000 international students were enrolled at the University of Melbourne and RMIT University: this represents 32 per cent of all international student enrolments at Victorian higher education institutions, although some of these enrolments are at campuses outside of the Melbourne's CBD. Additional students are enrolled at smaller CBD-based campuses of other universities. An extended free tram zone would make Melbourne a more attractive study destination for those students. Increased mobility will drive a bigger contribution from international education to the Victorian economy.

Separately, transport ticketing policy should be amended to allow international students to access the public transport ticket discounts available to domestic students. This is consistently raised as a priority issue by international student representative bodies and would represent an important welfare measure for international students who have remained in Victoria during the pandemic but have had difficulty obtaining employment and welfare support. It would also help Victoria rebuild the international education market once COVID-19 international travel restrictions are lifted.

Recommendations

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Final Infrastructure Strategy should:

- *Not include the abolition of the Free Tram Zone; and*
- *Expand the Free Tram Zone to encompass the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct and Arts precinct, to enhance student accessibility and experience and to promote the broader benefits generated by the Zone.*
- *Allow international students access to the public transport ticket discounts available to domestic students, to support those students who have remained in Victoria during the pandemic, and to help rebuild the international education market once travel restrictions are lifted.*

Research infrastructure

Research infrastructure is a significant omission from the Draft strategy. Ongoing investment to maintain and upgrade the State's research infrastructure is essential to the performance of Victoria's research sector. Given the importance of this sector to Victoria's social and economic wellbeing, it is essential that research infrastructure be given a place in the Draft Strategy.

Apart from NCRIS, the Australian Government provides no routine funding to universities in support of research infrastructure. The Victorian Government has been active in this area in this past; the synchrotron facility in Clayton, and the Melbourne biomedical precinct are two examples of State-supported infrastructure that have delivered tangible benefits to research performance and impact, jobs and new industries. The capacity for the Doherty Institute to have played such a critical role in Australia's COVID-19 response is a direct consequence of investment decisions by the Commonwealth

and State Governments, and the precinct partners, over a decade ago. Similarly, the attraction and retention of major global industry presence in the precinct derives directly from the critical mass of research and clinical expertise built up over many years.

Victoria's commitment to invest in the Australian Institutes of Infectious Diseases and Global Health (AIIDGH) will further strengthen our infectious disease response capabilities, and increase business investment in research commercialisation to drive economic growth. The trajectory of industry development in the Fishermans Bend precinct highlights the importance of forward planning for relevant manufacturing and related research infrastructure planning. The \$2 billion 'Breakthrough Victoria Fund' announced in the 2020/21 Budget is a major investment in Victoria's research capacity for which the Victorian Government is to be commended. The expectation is that this will provide further support for research infrastructure.

Given the importance of maintaining existing research infrastructure and investing in new facilities, research infrastructure should be explicitly addressed in Victoria's long-term Infrastructure Strategy. Research infrastructure investment supports the objectives identified in the Draft Strategy, in particular objectives five (Lift productivity), six (Drive Victoria's changing globally integrated economy) and nine (Advance climate change mitigation and adaptation). It is therefore appropriate that the State's program for investment in research infrastructure is integrated into the broader infrastructure strategy. A strategic approach to research infrastructure, with a clear focus on State priorities, would ensure that investment aligns with Victoria's research strengths and with the needs of industry.

Recommendation:

The University of Melbourne recommends that the Infrastructure Strategy should recognise the importance of building and maintaining research infrastructure, given its role in supporting the objectives identified in the Draft Strategy.