



30 April 2025

Mr Jonathon Spear
Chief Executive Officer
Infrastructure Victoria

Sent by email: enquiries@infrastructurevictoria.com.au

Dear Mr Spear

Re: Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy 2025-2055

Glenelg Shire Council (Council) provides this submission on the *Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy 2025-2055* (the Strategy) as released by Infrastructure Victoria (IV).

Council welcomes the opportunity to review and provide comments on the updated Strategy and recognises the need for a strategic approach in delivering upon long-term infrastructure needs across the State.

The Strategy comes at a critical time in which substantial issues and opportunities exist within Glenelg Shire, with some development and investment progressing, whilst other development is held back in the absence of critical enabling and community infrastructure. This scenario is magnified in a rural and regional setting, in which the basic infrastructure services and needs are not made available, when compared with a metropolitan setting, which isolates communities and significantly limits investment attraction, development and growth opportunities.

Fundamentally, the Strategy gives a priority focus on metropolitan Melbourne and glaringly omits any specific focus on the infrastructure needs and priorities of regional Victoria, including those in Glenelg Shire. This is a significant shortfall and must be considered to ensure that regional Victoria is equitably considered and supported for investment, to leverage and realise future opportunities – to grow and thrive.

When planning for the infrastructure future of the State, rural and regional areas must not be forgotten, as these strategies and plans are heavily relied upon to undertake further targeted work and facilitate major funding. Too often the focus is placed on Melbourne and major regional centres (e.g. Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo), as shown in the recent Plan for Victoria, with other regional and rural areas overlooked, which appears to be a major gap in the development of Statewide strategies.

Council recognises that the Strategy cannot, and is not, intended to provide the detail at such a granular and localised level and sub-regional level, however, an integrated approach is essential in planning for Victoria out to 2055.

Glenelg Shire is rich in natural resources, has a skilled and capable workforce and has significant strength with a natural deep-sea port which has both road and rail links which connects the Shire, and Portland more specifically, with a global market. Significant development is currently in the planning and delivery stages in renewable energy development and utility storage – both onshore and offshore – whilst the Port of Portland is a hub for imports and exports as the only natural deep-water port between Melbourne and Adelaide.

Critically, Glenelg Shire is also located in the westernmost part of the State, adjoining the South Australian border, which presents both opportunities and constraints. The physical isolation and lack of connectivity with major cities has proved as a long-standing challenge in realising investment in critical infrastructure needs – both public and private. Significant cross-border opportunities also exist in logistics, freight, tourism and trade, and should be considered in future infrastructure needs.

To provide a specific example, agriculture, including the forestry industry is a significant economic driver within Glenelg Shire, contributing to a large proportion of agricultural production in Victoria and generating approximately \$587.5 million (.idcommunity, 2023) of economic output.

The Port of Portland itself contains six (6) deep-water berths, handles approximately 7 million tonnes of cargo per annum, contributes \$1.5 billion to the regional economy, and provides 500 jobs (direct) through its 24-hour operations. The Port itself retains bulk handling specialisations and is the world's largest hardwood chip export port.

Council continues to see new investment and diversification in agricultural industries, technology and production systems, with optimal local conditions, land capability and location that provides significant comparative advantage, yet the Strategy itself provides limited, if any reference, to the future industry, infrastructure and transport needs of this sector to transform it to meet future needs and realise value-add opportunities. This includes the significant future inter-regional opportunities in connecting agricultural and mineral resources from northern and central Victoria through to the Port of Portland for international exports.

Council's submission on the Strategy is provided in response to the themes, relevant recommendations and future options, elevating key strategic issues and priorities, along with raising specific comments on infrastructure needs which are critical to the future growth, prosperity and well-being of the Shire.

Regional Victoria cannot be overlooked or forgotten in a 30-year infrastructure strategy and it is critical that both the Victorian and Commonwealth Government commit to fair and equitable investment into community, social, economic and development infrastructure, which realises regional growth opportunities and community needs.

Theme 1: Victorians have good access to housing, jobs, service and opportunities

Recommendation 1: Social Housing

There has been a significant long-term underinvestment in social housing in Glenelg Shire, both in Portland and the surrounding rural townships. The overall SEIFA index for Glenelg Shire is 952, which shows that comparatively with other areas, the municipality experiences a much higher level of socio-economic disadvantage.

Further to this, rural councils like Glenelg are disproportionately impacted by limited access to social and community services like family violence support, health care, supported education places, disability services, aged care and the like, all of which further marginalise specific population cohorts, compounding their disadvantage.

When addressing social housing it is also crucial to consider the wrap around services that must be available to support successful housing initiatives, whilst providing ongoing stability for marginalised population groups and the community more broadly.

A targeted approach to address social housing is required across regional Victoria and within Glenelg Shire to holistically address disadvantage, and this must be more than a recommendation, it requires actual delivery. Work must be undertaken with social service providers and housing associations to not only identify housing needs but also the required support services, with investment across the State occurring directly thereafter.

Further barriers exist with the lack of available serviced and market-ready land which can be delivered at lower cost, which considers funding requirements and not-for-profit business models, enabling other proponents the opportunity to also invest in addressing the gaps within the housing market.

Recently, there has been a couple of Big Housing Build projects in the Shire that have contributed to addressing this matter, but the lack of coordination with local social and health service providers remains a significant concern.

Recommendation 2: Markets for Kindergarten Infrastructure

The provision and opening of markets for kindergarten infrastructure must also include rural and regional Victoria interests, including integration and investment childcare, which exists as a significant gap within Glenelg Shire.

Figures provided within the draft Strategy clearly outline the need for assistance in market facilitation and targeted investment in rural Victoria, where the economic benefits and financial metrics may have limited viability. Conversely, there remains significant demand for both early years education and childcare, which both Council and the private sector cannot fully cover.

Council, as a member of the South West Victoria Alliance, has identified the needs for investment in childcare and early years services within the region, with families currently facing insufficient availability of early childhood education and care, leading to workforce shortages, causing local under-employment, social and economic impacts, which is placing a significant strain on families and wider communities. This is particularly magnified in the current challenging economic setting.

Council strongly advocates for early years education and childcare reform, which increases funding and makes these services more accessible for parents and families, growing our local economy and reducing social inequity.

Recommendation 4: Expand TAFE in Melbourne and some large regional centres

The lack of available education options within rural and regional Victoria significantly contributes to population leakage and impacts population attraction, whereby young people often leave Glenelg Shire for education and are unlikely to return in the short to medium term – taking their skills and potential with them.

Increased investment in both TAFE and university facilities will enhance the attractiveness and benefits of regional migration and lifestyle, whilst also offering significant opportunities to partner with industry to tailor education programs that meet local needs and consider the workforce opportunities and education requirements of the future. This includes industries such as renewable energy, hydrogen, advanced manufacturing and processing, along with other community, health and administrative services, all of which are heavily concentrated within the Shire and wider region.

Council has recently supported an unsuccessful application for the establishment of a Country University Campus in Portland, which would provide in-place education facilities and options, and submits that regional investment in TAFE and university education is critical for future prosperity.

Recommendation 5: Build libraries and aquatic centres for Melbourne's growing communities

Council notes the basis of this recommendation, however, wishes to highlight and submit that again investment in large recreational facilities cannot just occur in metropolitan Melbourne and growth areas.

Council owns and operates library services, which includes the Portland Library (with outreach mobile library), and Casterton and Heywood Libraries as satellite facilities, and also owns and carries out asset ,facility management and maintenance on four (4) aquatics and leisure facilities across the Shire. This includes the Portland Leisure and Aquatic Centre (PLACE), which was built in 1976 and is now at its end of useful and economic life.

PLACE is a highly valued and heavily utilised facility, relied upon by a broad cross-section of the community, with usage numbers over 100,000 people per annum and continuing to grow. This is supplemented by steady pool usage at Council's three (3) rural pools, open on a seasonal basis, which too are ageing and require substantial ongoing maintenance and renewal investment.

Council's Aquatics Strategy outlines options for facility refurbishment or redevelopment, with indicative cost, as at 2025, for the redevelopment of an integrated aquatics and leisure facility at approximately \$50 million. Given the financial constraints and challenges which face Council and the wider local government sector, State and Federal funding is critical to renew and upgrade these recreational facilities, which contribute to positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

Council also owns and operates a Basketball and Squash Stadium in Portland, which too has significantly aged in condition and requires either redevelopment or substantial refurbishment in the short-term. This has been identified as a priority project for Council, with a past unsuccessful funding application for the development of a new Multi-Purpose Stadium.

Council has recently commenced a review of major recreational facilities to consider future needs, investment and delivery options, which may include the potential consolidation and integration of a single multi-purpose stadium, aquatics and recreational centre in Portland, as the only regional centre between Warrnambool and Mount Gambier, providing a focal point for various sporting clubs and groups.

As the Strategy outlines, State Government funding is critical to all councils, not just growth or metropolitan councils, to support future service reviews and project planning to renew or redevelop major recreational and community assets, with an aim to achieve high-quality multi-purpose outcomes.

Future Option: More affordable homes

In an existing constrained and marginal property market, the delivery and provision of affordable homes in regional Victoria is limited. The provision of affordable housing is even more critical in areas such as Glenelg Shire which face higher levels of social disadvantage and low incomes.

Specific mechanisms and incentives must be considered. This may include through future Planning Scheme and *Planning and Environment Act* changes that release a larger proportion of affordable homes in areas and for mixed population cohorts which require this type of housing. Considering ongoing high residential subdivision, construction and delivery costs, conventional residential housing will not meet future affordable housing needs and different options are critically needed together with enabling infrastructure and community facilities and services.

Recommendation 12: Run more bus and coach services in regional Victoria

Glenelg Shire townships and communities are already heavily disadvantaged by the inconsistency and absence of public transport bus services which connect with regional train services. The limited schedules that regional bus services run also causes an impact on service use.

A strategic approach is required to ensure that future investment is provided into improved public transport options outside of regional centre, to improve connectivity and wellbeing. Glenelg Shire residents who do not have access to, or can't afford a car, are already heavily marginalised and isolated through substandard regional public transport services, which require further investment.

Theme 2: Victorians are healthy and safe

Recommendation 15: Build safe cycling networks

The provision of local cycling networks and infrastructure within rural and regional townships continues to fall behind the level of investment within metropolitan Melbourne and regional centres.

It is critical that the State Government consider programs and funding options which improve local cycling networks and linkages, both within and connecting townships, which will substantially contribute to enhanced residential amenity, activeness and wellbeing.

Again, in a financially constrained environment with a substantial proportion of aged assets, the ability for Council to invest in new cycling infrastructure is limited, which has a direct impact on the population and liveability.

Council has adopted a Tracks and Trails Strategy, and is also finalising preparation of a Local Area Traffic Management Plan in Portland, which requires future funding for project design and implementation.

Recommendation 20: Upgrade critical public hospital infrastructure

Consistent with much of rural and regional Victoria, the health services and facilities within Glenelg Shire are ageing and require critical investment to meet short-term health care priorities and needs. These challenges are compounded by an ageing population, socio-economic disadvantage and growing levels of comorbidity.

Investments and upgrades cannot just occur at critical CBD and metropolitan facilities and must consider the future healthcare needs and facility requirements of health services within regional Victoria.

Of particular importance is the ability to efficiently transport patients from rural hospitals and health services to complex medical facilities within the 'golden hour'. At present, the helipad at the Portland Hospital is closed due to aviation safety risks, requiring critical and urgent care patients to be transported to the Portland Airport taking approximately 20 minutes, before accessing Air Ambulance to provide transport to an alternative location, including Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool. This double transport erodes vital time in which effective care can be provided to improve a patient's chance of survival or other health outcome.

An upgrade of helipad facilities at Portland Airport to safely cater for Air Ambulance would greatly benefit patient medical treatment access and health outcomes.

Theme 4: Victoria has a thriving natural environment

Recommendation 25: Advance integrated water management and use more recycled water

Integrated Water Management (IWM) outcomes present significant opportunities to realise sustainability initiatives and lower the environmental impacts of new development and infrastructure.

Council continues to participate in the Great South Coast IWM Forum, one of the ten (10) forums across the State, with projects identified to investigate and promote water reuse and recycling within Portland. There is also significant opportunity to ensure the IWM and environmentally sustainable development (ESD) practices area integrated within future development, which promote triple-bottom-line outcomes.

For Council, we manage a substantial ageing, and in circumstances failing, drainage network, resulting in significant loss and adverse impacts from water, with limited financial capacity to renew and establish new drainage networks and IWM systems within established areas. Future funding and support is critical to support councils in retrospectively addressing drainage and infrastructure needs within existing townships with a focus on IWM outcomes.

Budj Bim and Tae Rak are also located within the Glenelg Shire, with the support for increased water flows and management. This is an identified ongoing project, which will continue to improve environmental and tourism outcomes through this valued asset and surrounding environs.

Future option: Plan for and invest in manufactured water

Council maintains an ongoing close partnership working with its Traditional Owners, namely the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, and supports

the ongoing implementation of actions, initiatives and investment to realise outcomes within the Water is Life Roadmap.

Recommendation 26: Better use of government land for open space

Large amounts of underutilised and poorly maintained and managed public (Crown) land exist across Glenelg Shire, both within and outside of townships, which through funding to DEECA, Parks Victoria and other land managers, including Council as Committee of Management, presents significant opportunities to improve the activation and utilisation of the land for public benefit.

For example, Crown Land managed by DEECA along the coast in the small township of Narrawong, attracts a significant number of visitors annually, however, the condition of facilities which exist have deteriorated, with amenities which are largely inaccessible. Investment in public land management is needed to improve these assets for public benefit and use. Nelson, a township on the Victorian/South Australian border, is another which has large areas of public Crown Land which require funding for improved use and management.

Open space outside of urban and metropolitan centres present valuable opportunities to invest relatively small amounts of money into improvements and maintenance, which will enhance regional visitation, tourism and wellbeing outcomes.

In addition, Council also advocates for a review in Crown Land/State Government facility rationalisation, with an aim to accommodate shared facilities and multi-purpose outcomes, particularly within regional and rural communities, which benefit agencies and authorities, and also provide for enhance community use.

Theme 5: Victoria is resilient to climate change and other future risks

Recommendation 27: Better prepare infrastructure for climate change

The local economy within Glenelg Shire is primarily based on agricultural production through rich natural resources, highly fertile land and consistent rainfall. However, amid a changing climate, with recent and ongoing drought conditions having a significant impact overall production, output and resilience, the future of agriculture in the Shire and region is vulnerable.

Council highlights the importance of the agricultural sector to the State and National economy and notes that the Strategy should make commitments to future investments in water infrastructure, with overall benefits to yields and production, water consumption and management, economic growth and job creation, and environmental sustainability.

Investment in water infrastructure is strategically significant and crucial for enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting economic growth and ensuring sustainable water management. The Strategy must recognise work being led by Agriculture Victoria through the Regional Drought Resilience Program and identify the importance of developing a State agriculture industry plan, which considers water needs and the impact of climate change.

Recommendation 28: Use new flood maps to revise planning schemes

It is critical that the State Government take responsibility to centralise and coordinate the development and implementation of flood mapping within Planning Schemes

across Victoria, in a similar way to bushfire management overlay following the Black Saturday Royal Commission.

Flood investigations are highly expensive, publicly controversial, complex and time consuming, with the current responsibility placed on Council to deliver and lead the implementation of this work through planning scheme amendments. In practical terms, these then get developed by the local Catchment Management Authorities, even though responsibility is placed on local Council to implement and administer them. Flood risks are real, and gaps exist across regional Victoria, of areas which are at flood risk but have not been identified or mapped within planning schemes.

Additionally, there is planning policy uncertainty across the State regarding both flooding and coastal inundation, in which the Planning Policy Framework identifies that councils must plan for sea level rise at no less than 0.8 metres by 2100 under Clause 13.01-2. However, some councils, Government Departments and Planning Panels are proceeding with higher levels. This is also occurring within Glenelg Shire, in which Council is currently progressing exhibition of a Flood Investigation and coastal township structure plan at 1.2m sea level risk. This has the potential to cause local confusion and planning uncertainty, noting much of the original base data work was based on 0.8m sea level rise.

The establishment of standardised flood projections and maps, based on local features, conditions and topography, supported by clear public information, will vastly assist in improved land use planning outcomes and community awareness of the risks and impacts presented by flooding, including riverine, overland and coastal inundation.

Areas at flood risk need to be managed, limited for development and protected for the natural and environmental value, and Council support the State Government taking lead with this recommendation.

Recommendation 29: Coordinate faster delivery of key energy infrastructure

It must be recognised that planning for renewable energy projects and Renewable Energy Zones (REZ), as being advanced by VicGrid, has generated longstanding uncertainty within Western Victoria. Glenelg Shire has existing operational wind farms and continues to regularly receive enquiries and both genuine and speculative interest for new wind energy and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) projects.

It is fundamental that strategic and policy direction guide future renewable energy and BESS needs across the State, principally regional Victoria where the development happens. Rather than continuing with the ongoing situation of ongoing project planning, approvals and speculation, the REZ areas need to be established. This is to avoid a 'cart before the horse' scenario.

VicGrid recently consulted in 2024 on REZ strategic land use assessment and community benefit programs, with councils awaiting the next steps with the declaration of REZ by the Minister, including any associated parameters and conditions.

REZ areas continue to generate high uncertainty for both Council and its rural community, in which it is understood that large-scale projects will still be open to obtain approval outside of declared areas.

It must also be recognised that large-scale renewable projects have the potential to disproportionately impact rural communities, in which benefits need to be strategically aligned and invested into the communities they impact to uplift wellbeing and community outcomes.

The recent change to include large-scale renewable energy projects in the development facilitation pathway, limiting third-party involvement and review rights, has also caused local interest and potentially undermines the ability for community input and scrutiny of a project potentially eroding the social license.

Council recognises the need for the energy transition to continue to occur with a focus on renewable energy and storage. However, the fast-tracking and delivery of these projects should not disadvantage rural communities to achieve policy targets or meet Government and metropolitan aspirations.

Balanced strategic direction and decision making is required, which considers local and regional strategic land use planning direction and priorities, and maintains the protection of productive agricultural, significant landscapes and areas of environment value, which are of high importance within the Glenelg Shire.

Council awaits release of the upcoming 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan and any declared REZ areas through VicGrid, which aims to guide renewable energy development and transmission planning over the next 15 years.

Recommendation 33: Develop regional energy plans

Council supports the recommendation to develop regional energy plans and considers that Portland presents a fantastic opportunity for this to be trialled with the scale of existing heavy-industry, including both Portland Aluminium and the Port of Portland, future proposed investments in industry, manufacturing, logistics and energy, and with upcoming plans for an offshore wind farm.

A strategic approach is required to advance the opportunities of a regional centre, with Portland a great fit for funding and this work to be undertaken in partnership with Council, stakeholders, industry and Government.

The Future Portland Project is a multifaceted initiative focused on diversifying the local economy and creating a more sustainable and prosperous future for the region. This project includes the planning for a future energy park, key regional infrastructure upgrades associated with freight and industry, economic diversification and mapping of strategic projects and priorities delivering regional benefits, economic resilience and strategic advantage.

This work has the potential to form a great basis and starting point the development of a regional energy plan for homes and industry within Glenelg Shire.

Theme 6: Victoria has a high productivity and circular economy

Recommendation 35: Infrastructure sector plans

Building upon recent Statewide strategic work undertaken through Plan for Victoria, the preparation of regional infrastructure plans has significant merit and would assist in identifying the key barriers and constraints which need to be unlocked through infrastructure investment, to realise future growth and economic opportunities.

Recent strategic examples exist through the Green Triangle Freight Action Plan, Maroona to Portland Rail Line Upgrade, Dairy Supply Chain and Western Victoria Grain Supply Chain. However, an integrated plan which brings this information together and considers residential, industrial and community infrastructure needs, would provide a large advantage to Council, State and Commonwealth Governments, and the private sector, in prioritising and funding core infrastructure and providing investor confidence.

Recommendation 36: Reform infrastructure contributions

The provision and delivery of both core services and enabling infrastructure has been a long-term barrier to realising residential, commercial and industrial development opportunities. The fact is that, broadly the market economics and characteristics don't incentivise investment in this infrastructure with low and uncertain development return, whilst rural councils typically don't have a sophisticated or established developer infrastructure contributions scheme.

The key to growth is infrastructure delivery. Funding is critical. However, a planning and partnership approach is also required, particularly working with water/sewer authorities, to bring forward capital investment and move away from the standard developer pays first model.

Recommendation 37: Improve asset management

As a large rural council by virtue of population, budget and resources, Council still has significant challenges in managing, renewing and rationalising its vast portfolio of assets.

Already, Council spends well beneath the required amounts, relative to asset values, to manage its asset renewal gap and effectively implement best-practice asset management and life-cycle planning approaches.

Council has commitments to continue to review and improve its asset management planning and systems, however, we would strongly support any financial or resource assistance to enhance assessment management, including the establishment of current condition data, use and performance standards, which benefit both the organisation and the community. This position is reinforced by recent State and Commonwealth inquiries which have identified that rate capping has significantly restructured council investment in asset renewal.

Recommendation 38: More recycling and waste infrastructure

By virtue of its remote location in the west of the State, adjoining the South Australia border, the provision of waste management and recycling services come at a significant cost to Council. This is largely borne by the costs in collection, receipt, processing and the subsequent haulage of waste categories to various locations.

Financial assistance is required to support Council as it transitions to the four (4) bin kerbside system, required by the *Circular Economy Act 2021*, and to also advance localised circular economy initiatives. Council has modelled various options to process organics through composting or biochar, however, these will come at both a significant capital and operational cost, which without further funding to model options and delivery, are unlikely to be economically viable or undertaken.

With the availability of zoned industrial land within Portland, waste received by Council and the by-products of associated industry, such as forestry, there is a huge opportunity to realise investment in the establishment of facilities and industry that lead value-add circular economy initiatives.

Recommendation 39: Use digital technologies

As with core services and enabling infrastructure, the provision of advanced digital technologies has now become a fundamental requirement in the promotion of industrial investment attachment. Industry now requires this infrastructure as part of their operations and expects this to be provided in order to develop in a location.

Notwithstanding the benefit of Government investing in these technologies for major projects, an opportunity exists to fund the establishing of modern and advance digital technology in regional industrial precincts, which will present opportunities to revolutionise industry mix with both direct and indirect economic benefits. Glenelg Shire, principally Portland, again provides a fantastic opportunity to trial and program which invests in these technologies to leverage new opportunities.

Recommendation 41: Make rail freight competitive, reliable and efficient

The establishment of an integrated and strategic rail-freight network plans and a 10-year rail maintenance program is a vital recommendation to take forward to implementation.

With funding announced in 2024 for the upgrade of the Maroona-Portland Rail Line at a cost of \$150 million, significant future opportunity exists in connection between Northern Victoria and the Wimmera to a deep-sea port for export and import opportunities. With future growth in cropping and grain production, mineral sand exploration and extraction and renewable energy development, the economic value this rail line upgrade will bring locally and to the State is significant.

Further to this is a study done by the South Australia State Government, and supported by the current draft Limestone Coast Regional Plan, that has identified there would be benefit to reinstatement of rail line for freight from Mount Gambier to Heywood and Portland. This would remove a significant amount of truck traffic from the road.

However, a strategic approach is needed for long-term asset management and maintenance, which ensures the condition of the infrastructure is maintained for efficiency, safety and productivity, whilst future opportunities for connections and upgrades are explored.

The unique position of Glenelg Shire and the Port of Portland with rail line access to valuable resources is a major economic opportunity at a State and National level.

Council also highlights that the lack of access to passenger rail within Glenelg Shire also compounds regional connectivity issues and population attraction, and would encourage the State Government to continue to explore future passenger rail opportunities across the State. This includes potential extension of the Melbourne-Warrnambool rail line, along with a potential future passenger service on the Maroona-Portland rail line.

We trust this submission will be given due consideration in planning and preparation of the draft 30-Year Victoria Infrastructure Strategy.

Please contact Aaron Moyne, Director Infrastructure Services, on [REDACTED] or by email [REDACTED] should you have any questions or require further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Helen Havercroft', written in a cursive style.

Helen Havercroft
Chief Executive Officer