

Melbourne's Western Region

STRATEGIC ISSUES REVIEW

Prepared by *Economic Partnerships* for Peter Tesdorpf and Associates Pty Ltd October 2005 as part of the "Leadership for the West" Regional Governance and Strategy Project

1. Introduction

1.1 *Background and Purpose*

Melbourne's Western Region has a long history of regional co-operation - whether that be in the area of economic development - as was primarily the case with the Western Region Commission (WRC)¹, the Western Region Economic Development Organisation (WREDO)² and the Melbourne West Area Consultative Committee Inc - or in community services, as in the case of the Western Regional Council for Social Development and others.

The purpose of this document is to review several recent studies focusing on the Western Region in order to identify the key issues affecting the region over the past five years.

The document does not put forward strategies to address the issues, as this would require analysis and work beyond the current study budget.

However the identification of the strategic issues identified in these studies, together with those raised in the stakeholder consultation process, provides a sound basis for the new regional development organisation to prioritise its future work and action.

1.2 *Studies Reviewed*

A number of previously completed studies focusing on the Western Region have been reviewed for the current project.

The studies reviewed are unlikely to be the only ones undertaken over the past five years, however they have been chosen because of their region-wide and strategic focus.

Studies reviewed are noted in Table 1 below.

¹ The Western Region Commission was established in the early 1980s with a Charter to promote the interests of the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne, primarily with regard to employment. It closed its doors in 1994 when its role was superseded by the Western Region Economic Development Organisation (WREDO).

² The WREDO was established in 1994 as result of the Keating Government's Regional Economic Development Program and closed in 2005 as a result of operational and funding issues.

Table 1: Studies Reviewed

Title	Author & Sponsor Organisation	Broad Content
Community Regeneration in Melbourne's West	Jago Dodson & Mike Berry Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute & RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre	Outcomes of economic and industrial change and impacts on the labour and housing markets in Melbourne's Western metropolitan Region
Investing Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition	Prof Peter Sheehan, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies & Prof John Wiseman, Centre for Community Engagement and Policy Alternatives at Victoria University	An examination of existing data and research on trends and prospect for the region to inform future investment choices for the Western Region
Western Region Employment and Industrial Development Strategy - Context Document	Ratio Consultants Pty Ltd in association with NIEIR, CB Richard Ellis and CSIRO Transport Futures	The purpose of the project was to identify the long-term need for well-located industrial and commercial land in the region.
Strategic Regional Plan 2004-2007	Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee	Outlines priorities for the development and growth of Melbourne's Western Region
Growing Western Melbourne Together	Peter Kearns, Global Learning Services	Provides a strategy to guide the development of Melbourne's West as a Learning and Innovation region.
Western Region of Melbourne Skills, Employment and Population Snapshot	WREDO with funding from the Australian Government Regional Assistance Program, 6 LGAs in the region and 3 LLENs	A snapshot of labour market and industry trends and tools to identify the skill needs of businesses and other regional stakeholders.
Western Melbourne Region Tourism Strategy and Business Plan	Urban Enterprise Pty Ltd	An investigation of the value of tourism to the Western Region, leading to a vision for further development and associated strategies, and supporting business plan.

In addition to the above studies, Council Strategic Plans, and Municipal Strategic Statements for the six Local Government Areas that make up the Western Region were examined. As these documents only refer to a particular local government area and are not regional in their focus they have not been specifically reviewed, however key issues with regional implications raised in these documents have been taken into account, as have the issues raised during the stakeholder consultation process.

1.3 Key Issues

A wide range of issues has been canvassed in this project either in the studies reviewed. These have been categorised into six groups as follows:

- Education and skills;
- Economic development and jobs (including business support and attraction);
- Transport and infrastructure;
- Health and community development;
- Tourism, recreation, arts and culture; and
- Environment and planning.

In addition, there are a number of recurring themes either explicitly or implicitly raised during the consultations and/or in the strategy reports. These are:

- Partnership and collaboration;
- Fragmentation, lack of co-ordination and strategic direction; and
- The presence of a number of regional organisations with a broad spread of membership/representation. However, none of these appear to be acknowledged universally as leader organisations in the region.

2. Strategic Issues

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter of the report key findings of the strategic review are presented together with issues that need to be addressed. They are arranged in the six groupings listed earlier.

2.2 Education and Skills

Education, training and skills are considered to be critical issues in the Western Region by those consulted as part of this project and further, four of the studies reviewed directly addressed issues relating to education, training and skills:

- Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition;
- Growing Western Melbourne Together;
- Western Region of Melbourne Skills, Employment and Population Snapshot; and
- Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee Strategic Regional Plan 2004 - 2007.

Context

Overall, residents of Melbourne's Western Region have relatively low levels of formal education and qualifications compared with the metropolitan area as a whole. Just under 70% of the region's population have completed Year 12 or below.

Brimbank, has the lowest educational attainment levels of the six municipalities that make up the Region, with 75.5% of its residents having completed Year 12 or below. Further, Melton, Brimbank and Wyndham have only around half the state average number of residents with Bachelor degrees.

Conversely, Hobsons Bay has the highest proportion of the regional population with postgraduate qualifications (3.7% of its residents), and only Moonee Valley and Maribyrnong record at, or higher than state average, levels of residents with Bachelor degrees.

Overall, the region has the lowest rate of tertiary qualified graduates in metropolitan Melbourne.

Perhaps more disturbingly, the number of VCE completions in the West remained relatively static over the period 1998 to 2002, while those for metropolitan Melbourne and the state as whole increased. On Track³ data of Western Region VCE completers in 2003 reveals the following:

- 39.7% went on to university (compared with 44.3% for metropolitan Melbourne as a whole);

³ DE&T On Track 2004

- 24.9% undertook Diploma or Certificate IV (ie higher level vocational education and training [VET] studies (22.4%);
- 7.6% undertook Certificates I to III (6.6%);
- 4.2% undertook an apprenticeship or traineeship (4.3%);
- 16.9% were employed (17.3%); and
- 6.5% were unemployed (5.1%).

In light of the above, and notwithstanding some variations between regional municipalities, it is not surprising that the occupational distribution of employment of regional residents shows a lower than state average proportion of persons employed in the advanced knowledge service sectors (ie managers and administrators, professionals and para professionals); and a correspondingly higher proportion of residents employed in intermediate transport and production, elementary clerical, sales and service and labouring occupations.

There is a slightly higher than average proportion of tradespersons and related workers among the residents of the Western Melbourne region than for Victoria as a whole. Table 2 presents details.

Table 2: Employment by Occupation for the Western Melbourne Region and Victoria, 2001 (%)

Occupation	Brimbank	Maribyrnong	Hobsons Bay	Melton	Moonee Valley	Wyndham	Total WMR	Vic
Managers & Administrators	4.4	7.2	5.9	5.6	7.9	6.9	6.2	9.5
Professionals	10.3	17.2	20.9	10.7	23.9	12.0	15.5	19.2
Associate Professionals	8.6	11.0	10.6	10.3	12.3	10.4	10.4	11.4
Tradespersons & Related Workers	14.3	12.6	9.8	15.0	10.3	14.6	12.9	12.2
Advanced Clerical & Service Workers	3.0	3.6	2.9	3.7	4.5	3.8	3.6	3.6
Intermediate Clerical, Sales & Service Workers	17.0	17.7	16.3	19.2	17.7	19.4	17.8	16.1
Intermediate Production & Transport Workers	15.4	10.5	11.4	13.0	6.2	11.9	11.5	8.1
Elementary Clerical, Sales & Service Workers	11.6	8.9	9.8	11.2	9.5	10.3	10.3	9.6
Labourers & Related Workers	12.8	9.0	9.9	8.9	5.6	8.7	9.4	8.2
Inadequately described	0.9	0.8	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.8
Not stated	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ABS 2001: Census of Population and Housing

Issues

In light of the context relating to education and skills development in Melbourne's Western Region outlined above, a number of key issues are identified:⁴

⁴ The issues noted throughout this chapter have been identified in the studies reviewed for this project as well as by participants in the consultation process.

- The skills base of the region's residents is low, leaving them ill equipped for the jobs emerging as part of the 'new economy' and less able to adjust to changes in the workplace.
- This results in a shortage of certain types of skills within the region that consequently have to be 'imported'. Many regional firms have to draw employees from outside the region, and this leads to economic leakage and adds to pressures on the transport system.
- The region has the lowest rate of tertiary qualified graduates in the metropolitan area.
- School retention rates are the lowest in the metropolitan area with many young people dropping out of school prior to completion of Year 12, with the consequence the rate of youth unemployment in the Western Melbourne Region is higher than in other parts of Melbourne.
- While many parents have higher expectations for their children, the lack of opportunities means those expectations are unlikely to be met and consequently young people will move out of the region, further eroding its potential.
- There is a lack of access to education for Western Region people. There is a perception that training courses may be available but are not being rolled to the people who need them. This is compounded by poor transport, which makes access to university and colleges difficult for young people.
- Lack of access to computers and the internet also inhibits access to a range of educational opportunities.
- There is a need to build the social and human capital needed to enable the region and its residents to participate fully in the knowledge based economy.
- The decline of traineeship and cadetship programs, particularly in the larger industries, needs to be reversed so as to provide essential vocational experience for young people who have degrees but no work experience.

Strategic Ideas

Developing Knowledge and Social Capital⁵

The *Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition* report recommends a program of "Developing Knowledge and Social Capital". The following is a summary:

The concept of 'educationally relevant social capital' is gaining currency. Children of families that are above average in terms of education, occupation and income tend to achieve above average educational outcomes, such as retention to Year 12, final year examination results and university entrance. Similarly, schools that educate children of such families achieve better than average outcomes and the overall educational results for the areas in which these families reside are also better.

In light of this, there is an increasingly recognised case for disadvantages resulting from a dearth of educationally relevant social capital to be offset by additional teaching and other educational resources in schools. *In other words, where children are not able to draw on sufficient learning resources from their families and social networks, stronger learning resources are required in schools.*

This will involve the following:

⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the concept of educationally relevant social capital and suggested strategies for addressing the issues see *Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition*

- Allocation of substantial resources to disadvantaged schools on a continuing basis;
- Victoria University (VU), as the principal provider of post secondary education in the region, to continue to build and strengthen pathways between school, TAFE and higher education to expand education and training opportunities for Western Region residents thereby enhancing the skills of the regional workforce; and
- VU, as a major provider of undergraduate and post graduate teacher education, to further its commitment to working in partnership with primary and secondary schools in the region to improve regional educational and training outcomes.

Development of Western Melbourne as a Learning and Innovation Region⁶

The Growing Western Melbourne Together report proposes the development of Western Melbourne as a “Learning and Innovation Region”. The following is a summary:

The recommended development of Western Melbourne as a learning and innovation region will assist the promotion of lifelong learning for the region’s residents, thereby better equipping them for the changing nature of work and assisting them to upskill. The following themes provide the framework for the West’s development as a learning and innovation region:

- **Promotion of learning:** in many and varied contexts, including the home, workplace, cultural activities, role of libraries and other community facilities as well as in educational institutions. An early priority should be the establishment of a Western Melbourne Learning Gateway as an on-line portal which could be used to promote special events and achievements.
- **Access to learning:** is directed at widening participation in learning and providing life long learning opportunities for all, via the identification of barriers to participation, widening English language and literacy provision, addressing the digital divide and ensuring that learning pathways extend from such gateway provision to vocational and leisure pathways throughout life.
- **Fostering creativity, enterprise and initiative:** a broad spectrum of factors is required to build a learning and innovation culture which is pervasive in business and industry as well as in education and community life. Proposals such as the Melton and Deer Park Learning Precincts should be seen as hubs of innovation, which can create ripple effects throughout their communities.
- **Skills for the New West:** the Western Melbourne Life and Employability Skills Framework (a project established by the WREDO) provides for a set of essential generic skills to underpin lifelong learning, maintain employability and to provide employers with a workforce able to adapt to changing conditions and to function as creative knowledge workers able to be enterprising and innovative. It is recommended that all stakeholders contribute to implementing the framework.
- **Strengthening the engagement of VU with the region:** this initiative provides an opportunity for VU to become fully engaged with its region through a shared vision, co-ordination of effort within the university, feedback and monitoring and accountability.
- **Environment and sustainable development:** will be central to the future of Western Melbourne and the triple bottom line approach integrating social, economic and environmental sustainability will be essential to success.

Three essential conditions are proposed for a successful learning community initiative:

- Leadership, partnership building and co-ordination provided through a small co-ordination group;
- Involvement of the whole community so that there is a sense of community identity and ownership; and
- Effective communication and information flows to all stakeholders.

⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the concept of Western Melbourne as A Learning and Innovation Region and associated recommendations see *Growing Western Melbourne Together*.

In order to promote effective implementation it is recommended that the following be established:

- A co-ordination committee with representation from all major stakeholders who will be partners in the initiative;
- A forum involving the wider community and providing for community views and feedback; and
- The development of a Western Melbourne Learning Gateway as an on-line portal as an initial step in a comprehensive communication strategy.

2.3 Economic Development and Jobs

Four of the studies reviewed directly addressed issues relating to economic development and employment growth:

- Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition;
- Growing Western Melbourne Together;
- Western Region of Melbourne Skills, Employment and Population Snapshot;
- Western Region Employment and Industrial Development Strategy;
- Community Regeneration in Melbourne's West; and
- Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee Strategic Regional Plan 2004 - 2007.

Economic development and employment were among the most frequently raised issues in the consultation process.

Context

Historically the Western Region of Melbourne has been a preferred location for industrial investment and development within the metropolitan area because of its accessibility initially to the Port of Melbourne, but also to Melbourne Airport, to road and rail links to south eastern Australian markets and sources of raw materials, and other parts of the metropolitan area, and also because of the large tracts of flat land.

The Western Region has enjoyed a period of industry and employment growth over the last 10 years, driven by major infrastructure investment and population growth.

The Western Region contains approximately 7,000 hectares of industrial land and over 42,000 businesses employing over 161,000 people.

The key industries include construction, property and business sectors, retail, transport and storage, personal and other services and manufacturing, for example the region has:

- 12.3% of the State's manufacturing and transport and storage jobs. These businesses account for 13.6% of Victoria's manufacturing gross output and 11.6% of the State's direct **manufacturing** jobs. The region is a successful exporter of a large range of manufactured goods, including chemicals manufacture.
- Transport and storage industries which play a large role in the western region economy with approximately 13.7% of all firms and 18.8% of large firms operating in the west being in this industry.
- Is home to nearly one in seven Victorian firms with more than 50 employees; however
- Only 6.5% of the State's knowledge based services jobs (ie technical business services, health, education, communications, and finance and insurance etc). The relatively low level of knowledge intensive service jobs is reflected in lower rates

of use of computers and the internet - the proportion of people using the internet is 15% lower and the proportion using a computer is 12% in the West than in Melbourne as a whole.

However, despite having some 12% of Victoria's population, the region only accounts for 8.5% of the State's jobs, and the physical scale of activity in the Western region, with the vast amount of investments in plant and equipment associated with transport and manufacturing industries, tends to overshadow a shortage in total economic capacity in the region:

- The Western Region has a substantial under-representation in a wide range of services jobs (including commercial, administrative government, health and education services) leading to significant regional shortfalls in the provision of business services, government and community services and retail and wholesale trade;
- There is a significant deficiency in local jobs, and jobs growth in the Western Region has not kept up; and
- There is significant dependence on Inner Melbourne for employment.

Whilst a large range of opportunities exist in the transport and storage (wholesale trade) sector, it is unlikely this industry alone will produce the large scale employment required to make a significant reduction in the structural unemployment in the western region.

The industries with the best capacity to create mass levels of employment are manufacturing, the retail industry and health and community services.

Significant employment and regional growth is predicted in:

- school education;
- other business services;
- legal and accounting services;
- hospitals and nursing homes;
- other health services;
- retail goods;
- services and hospitality;
- road freight transport;
- storage;
- government administration; and
- sport.⁷

Typically, the western region has been characterised as having high concentrations of low-income households and high rates of unemployment. However these appear to be declining and the image of the region is improving.

Issues

In light of the context outlined above, a number of key issues are identified:

- Rapid population growth in the west is outstripping job growth. VU research shows that ten years ago the region had 8% of Melbourne's population and 12% of the jobs, but now it is the other way round - 12% of population but only 8.5% of the jobs, with consequent impact on the transport system and economic leakage out of the region. (For example, 80% of Melton's workforce travels to jobs outside this LGA);
- The Western Region's historic location for industry within the metropolitan area together with its key global transport links makes it particularly vulnerable to the adverse as well as the potentially beneficial effects of economic globalization.

⁷ Western Region Employment and Industrial Development Strategy Context Document p 25

- The supply of industrial land is considered to be under threat. Demand for continued housing growth is resulting in pressure for rezoning of some industrial land for residential use. This is a threat to the adequate supply of land for new business growth, which is urgently needed by the region to meet demand for jobs.
- There is a need to grow existing businesses and attract new industries and of the right type.
- There is a need both to grow the number of jobs in the region as well as for a diversity of job types, because while the West's labour market, like that of the metropolitan area as a whole, has responded to the favourable economic conditions with declining levels of unemployment, the region still has higher rates of unemployment (some areas are more disadvantaged than others) than elsewhere in Melbourne and remains vulnerable, despite the level of industrial investment in recent years.
- The sectoral composition of the regional labour market continues to shift away from traditional industries such as manufacturing and towards sectors such as wholesale and retail trade, business services and personal services.
- Further increased capitalization in manufacturing has resulted in a decline in the number of unskilled and low skilled jobs available in the region.
- There is evidence that the Western Region has an industrial economy that is slowly transforming itself to become more diversified.
- There is a need to attract knowledge-based industries.
- While the agriculture, agribusiness and harness racing sectors are relatively small in the context of the regional economy, they have considerable potential. Urban development poses some threats to agricultural production.

Business Support and Attraction

Business support and attraction issues were directly addressed in a number of studies reviewed:

- Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition;
- Western Region Employment and Industrial Development Strategy;
- Community Regeneration in Melbourne's West? and
- Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee Strategic Regional Plan 2004 - 2007.

The Western Region has enjoyed a period of industry and employment growth over the past decade, driven by major infrastructure provision and strong population growth.

However if this growth is to continue, there will be a need to attract a range of new businesses to the region, and especially those that operate in the 'innovation economy' and move away from the more traditional manufacturing operations of the past.

Therefore attracting firms, especially small to medium sized businesses that offer 'knowledge based' jobs and respond to global economic change and new technologies and utilise the strengths of the region to access world markets will be paramount.

Issues

- There is a need to grow existing businesses and attract new industries and of the right type (ie knowledge based industries).

- The region will not continue to be economically sustainable with its present industrial structure nor will it be if can only attract transport and logistics operations.
- Demand for continued housing growth is resulting in pressure to rezone some industrial land to residential. This is a threat to the adequate supply of land for new business growth which is urgently needed by the region to meet demand for jobs.
- There is a high priority need to provide information, support and advice for businesses in the region. Examples of particular needs include regional socio-economic and industry data, business development advice, legal services, information about telecommunications technology and a business incubator in the region to assist start up businesses.
- The region lacks sufficient and suitable conference facilities and this acts as a disincentive to attracting 'new' industries and related businesses.
- There is a significant amount of escape expenditure in retailing.
- Networking and interactive relationships with other regional businesses are important.
- The region has insufficient conference and related facilities, which is perceived to act as a disincentive to new business attraction.

Strategies that have been previously put forward to attract and support new business development include:

- Attracting high technology employing industries to the region and continuing the transformation to a more diversified and service based economy.
- Encouraging employment of local residents in locally based industries and a ready supply of appropriately trained and skilled workers.
- Developing programs to promote learning and innovation to ensure that local residents have the requisite skills base.
- Facilitation of export development and import replacement programs.
- Ensuring there is a sufficient supply of appropriately developed land and buildings for a range of industrial and commercial purposes.
- Implementing mechanisms to facilitate networking between businesses to enable them to develop synergistic links.
- Actions to improve within and through region accessibility for the movement of freight and people. This includes extending and broadening capacity of the public transport options in the region.

2.4 Transport and Infrastructure

The enormous growth occurring in Melton and Wyndham highlights the issues surrounding transport and infrastructure and the need for new services to support domestic and business growth.

Transport infrastructure for existing communities is also perceived to be inadequate.

Stakeholders highlighted, and four of the studies reviewed directly addressed, issues relating to physical infrastructure and transport:

- Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition;
- Western Region of Melbourne Skills, Employment and Population Snapshot;
- Western Region Employment and Industrial Development Strategy;
- Community Regeneration in Melbourne's West? and
- Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee Strategic Regional Plan 2004 - 2007.

Context

Rapid urban growth in the Western region, particularly in the outer west and to a lesser extent in the inner west has brought issues surrounding physical infrastructure and transport into sharp focus.

Key economic infrastructure located in or in close proximity to the Western Region that is said to support and fuel economic development of the region includes:

- Port of Melbourne (Hobsons Bay);
- Melbourne Airport (located in the City of Hume, immediately to the north of Brimbank);
- Melbourne Rail Freight Terminal (east of Maribyrnong);
- Western Ring Road (Brimbank), Geelong Road (Wyndham), and Westgate Freeway (Hobsons Bay);
- South Kensington Rail Freight Terminal (Melbourne); and
- Tottenham Rail Freight Terminal (Maribyrnong);
- Essendon Airport.
- Avalon Airport (although its beneficial impact is more to Geelong).

These facilities lend weight to the argument that the region is closely integrated into national and global transport and logistics networks. As a result the region has been viewed as a favourable location for industrial development, particularly manufacturing that requires an efficient distribution network.

While the Western Region is accessible to national and international transport routes, a number of issues are identified in relation to movement of people within the region with key challenges centring around:

- relatively low levels of public transport patronage, reflecting limited access to rail and bus services, particularly in outer areas where population growth trends and projections are highest;
- increasing road traffic volumes and congestion;
- low quality arterial road links across the region;
- increasing volumes of freight transport through the region; and
- limited bicycle network infrastructure.

Issues

In light of the above, a number of key issues are identified:

- Transport in the western region is poor compared to other regions and this is promoting continued urban sprawl, with resultant environmental impacts.
- The poor levels of public transport coupled with the inadequate supply of jobs in the region results in large numbers of western region residents relying on private car travel for commuting, with resultant impacts on the inner parts of the region. Many tertiary students have difficulties travelling to their place of study, with resultant equity and social issues. This is a multi-faceted sustainability issue requiring an integrated solution of more sustainable urban development, improved public transport and more local jobs.
- A view among stakeholders that the State Government does not fully recognise that Melbourne's urban growth patterns are changing with the Western and Northern Regions overtaking the southeast corridor as the fastest growing metropolitan regions.
- With the development of new housing estates, there is increased need for infrastructure relating to roads, footpaths, electricity, gas, water and sewerage etc, as well as the need for a range of public and private community facilities such as childcare centres, community health centres and medical facilities, schools, neighbourhood and regional shopping centres, and recreational facilities and the like.
- There is a perception of poor co-ordination between government departments in the planning and provision of infrastructure.
- The need to renew older infrastructure, particularly in Hobson's Bay, Moonee Valley and Maribyrnong.
- Urban growth also puts pressure on existing public transport services (which are perceived to be limited and at over capacity) as well as creating a demand for additional services in areas not previously serviced.
- Widely spaced arterial roads limit regional connectivity between residential growth areas, employment and activity centres.
- Increased traffic on major and minor arterial roads, including the Westgate Freeway, Westgate Bridge and the Western Ring Road resulting in longer travel times (and hence increased costs) for the transport industry and commuters, as well as increased traffic congestion in suburban streets.
- The tram/light rail network in the region is extremely limited and lacks connectivity. There is considerable potential for it to be expanded.
- Councils have invested considerable time and effort in the state-government driven Western Integrated Transport Strategy, but there is scepticism that this has stalled.

Specific issues relating to rail transport include:

- Most rail lines in the region are at or over capacity already;
- There are no plans for any new rail lines or freight sidings, but new cross-suburban lines and freight lines are needed.
- Footscray station rail junction is a serious bottleneck and has outgrown its capacity.
- The Ballarat line is single track west of Deer Park.

- Bottlenecks and capacity problems occur at Sunshine.
- New rail stations are needed at Toolern Vale and Caroline Springs.
- North Melbourne is a serious bottleneck and congestion point.
- Werribee line suburban services will be impacted on by new regional fast rail services.
- Higher frequencies are needed on all lines.

A number of specific issues relating to road infrastructure were identified:

- The lack of capacity of the overall road system to cater for current and future densities of truck traffic, given the region's strategic role in intermodal logistics.
- The need for the Deer Park bypass.
- Tullamarine Freeway tolls result in additional traffic using the Western Ring Road which is already over-capacity.
- Inadequate capacity on the Westgate Bridge.
- The lack of alternatives to the Western Ring Road - stakeholders believe an additional outer ring road is needed.
- Significant traffic bottlenecks in several other locations.

Stakeholders also identified a number of issues relating to bus transport:

- The need for better coordinated bus services.
- The need for more frequent bus services.
- Inadequate government funding for new bus services, despite recent budget allocations.

General infrastructure concerns:

The lack of new infrastructure and the inadequacy of older infrastructure are seen as the biggest problem for the region and the greatest threat to its economic viability. Particular aspects of this include:

- Poor levels of co-ordination between government departments in the planning and provision of infrastructure.
- The lack of government response on infrastructure needs, due it seems in part to disbelief about the region's rapid growth rates.
- The need for improved utility infrastructure.
- The crucial relationship between land use planning and transport infrastructure is not adequately addressed in the region.

2.5 Health and Community Development

The studies reviewed and stakeholders consulted highlighted the high rates of urban growth in the outer parts of the region - particularly Melton and Wyndham - and the impact this has on the need for health and community services, especially when the communities in question are socio-economically mixed with significant proportions of lower income households.

Relevant studies include:

- Investing in Melbourne's West: A Region in Transition;
- Western Region of Melbourne Skills, Employment and Population Snapshot;
- Western Region Employment and Industrial Development Strategy;
- Community Regeneration in Melbourne's West? and
- Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee Strategic Regional Plan 2004 - 2007.

Context

The development of new suburbs in the municipalities of Brimbank, Melton and Wyndham in particular has resulted in population growth in the Western Region approximately double that of the rest of the metropolitan area.

This development has also changed the profile of the population in these areas especially in terms of age structure, socio-economic status.

The Western Region (and to a lesser extent, the Northern Region) has now taken over from the SouthEast corridor as the fastest growing metropolitan regions. This growth is being fuelled by:

- new household formation including an increasing number of single person households; and
- a trend for inner western region residents to re-locate to the outer parts of the region to enjoy more open space and the lifestyle amenity that accompanies it.

However others (often young professionals) who find the accessibility and amenity of the older, industrial suburbs attractive are replacing these former inner western region residents, thus gentrifying these areas and forcing some existing less advantaged residents to move out.

High rates of urban growth are putting pressure on existing social infrastructure, which in many cases is already stretched to capacity, this is especially the case in areas where urban growth has resulted in an increase in the proportion of low income households as it has in the outer western region localities of Wyndham-Melton.

This situation has been confirmed by studies relating to housing affordability showing that the more affordable properties are spatially concentrated in the outer and fringe suburbs.⁸

High rates of urban growth, an ageing population and a significant degree of socio economic disadvantage across parts of the region impact on the demand for, and nature of, health and community services in the region.

While it is hard to definitively measure either the health status of the people of the Western Region or their degree of access to health/hospital and community services, conventional wisdom suggests that in areas of significant socio economic disadvantage levels of use certain public health services may be higher than elsewhere.

⁸ See Community Regeneration in Melbourne's West? p10

The Disability Adjusted Life Years per 1,000 population (DALY)⁹ rates show that the municipalities of Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Hobsons Bay have well above Victorian average rates for males, while Maribyrnong and Brimbank also have high rates for females as well. In contrast Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham have lower than state average DALY rates for both men and women – perhaps a reflection of both younger age structure of the population, especially in Melton and Wyndham and higher socio economic status in Moonee Valley.

Approaches to Tackling Health and Community Development Issues

The West has a long tradition of social justice and community development work and there are many examples of partnered approaches to tackling social issues.

Much of the community service infrastructure in the region today resulted from the work of Western Region Council for Social Development, a critical partnership between local governments and others in the 1970's and 80's. However, many of the networks and co-operative working relationship in the region were eroded under the competition-based policies of the 1990's.

Over the last five years, joined up and partnership based initiatives have been developed across Victoria and have shaped many of the working relationships between agencies in the region. Examples include the LLENS, Primary Care Partnerships, Best Start, Family Support Services Initiative, and many community safety and crime prevention strategies.

Alongside this partnership approach has been renewed interest in place-based responses to disadvantage and an enhanced focus on social connectedness and community engagement. A number of neighbourhoods across the west have become the focus for trialling community strengthening projects such as the DVC funded demonstration projects, *Neighbourhood Renewal* and *Communities for Children*.

The Institute for Community Engagement and Policy Alternatives (ICEPA) at Victoria University recently hosted a western region community strengthening forum in partnership with several regional bodies and networks and launched the beginnings of a Western Region Social Justice Network. Such a network could play a key role in addressing community development issues across the region.

Issues

Both the studies reviewed and participants in the various consultation processes noted a number of issues relating to health and community services:

- Generally the region's schools and health infrastructure is inadequate.
- The Western region suffers from a history of underfunding of HACC services compared to other regions.
- The region has fewer non-government human services organisations than other Melbourne regions.
- With the development of new housing estates, there is increased need for infrastructure relating to roads, footpaths, electricity, gas, water and sewerage etc, as well as the need for a range of public and private community facilities such as childcare centres, community health centres and medical facilities, schools, neighbourhood and regional shopping centres, and recreational facilities and the like. There is a perception

⁹ A measure of the incidence of disease calculated by the Department of Human Services which can be used to compare the health status of municipalities with one another or the State average. A high DALY rate is indicative of a high incidence of disease.

of poor co-ordination between government departments in the planning and provision of infrastructure.

- The poorer health status of residents, which over time will impose a significant cost burden on governments and individuals unless the issues are addressed.
- There is a shortage of medical practitioners in the region. Some specialist services such as psychiatric services are non-existent. A key reason is that it is difficult to attract doctors to live in the region
- The high rate of population growth, and especially the number of new families with young children, is placing added demand on family services.
- Brimbank and Maribyrnong contain concentrations of people with low socio-economic status, high unemployment and low skill levels. These groups include newly arrived migrants who often feel disenfranchised and disengaged from the community, generating racial hostility and tension.
- Problem gambling is a significant issue for the community. There are high concentrations of poker machines and the lack of publicly funded community centres in the region has resulted in gambling venues becoming de facto community meeting places.
- There is a need for improved internet access, especially but not exclusively, for formal and informal education purposes.
- Engaging young people to take an active role in the community is a key challenge. The region's cultural diversity and large numbers of newly arrived migrants and refugees makes this particularly difficult; and Commonwealth Government resourcing of these issues is seen as inadequate.
- The lack of transport (especially public transport) has significant community development implications. There are few links to employment nodes, education centres shops and entertainment nodes, reinforcing car dependency, which impacts heavily on family budgets and traps people at home.

2.6 Tourism, Arts, Culture and Recreation

Tourism, arts, culture and recreation are important elements of any community.

These issues were raised by stakeholders, but were not as prominent in the studies reviewed.

The primary regional study to address these issues is the [Western Melbourne Region Tourism Strategy](#).

Context

At first glance, few would identify Western Melbourne as a tourist destination. In this it has much in common with many other metropolitan regions. However the following suggests a different situation:

- Visitors to the Western Melbourne region spend an estimated \$169 million per annum. Most of this expenditure is likely to have been incurred in the region.
- The flow-on economic benefit for the region, arising from this direct expenditure by visitors, is estimated at a further \$114 million per annum.

- There are almost 2000 businesses in the Western Melbourne region relating to “Accommodation, Cafes, Restaurants” and “Cultural and Recreational Services”. This represents around 5% of all businesses in the region. However, these figures do not include a substantial number of other businesses, particularly in the retail sector, that are related to tourism.
- There are over 9,800 jobs in the Western Melbourne region relating to “Accommodation, Cafes, Restaurants” and “Cultural and Recreational Services”. This represents around 6% of all jobs in the region.
- The Spring Racing Carnival, the Australian International Airshow and the Royal Agricultural Showgrounds are three major events held in the Western Melbourne region. These three events/venues alone create an economic contribution to Victoria of over \$750 million.
- Visitors to the major attractions and events in the Western Melbourne region total almost 6 million per annum.
- It appears that the Western Melbourne region captures a significant share of visitation to the overall Melbourne region. The region enjoys strong interest from interstate and international visitors - consistent with proportions being attracted by the Melbourne region overall.
- There is a high degree of correlation between the preferred activities of Tourism Victoria’s target market segments, and the existing product strengths in the Western Melbourne region.

With regard to the arts, culture and recreation, the Western region has a number of assets, including for example:

- a vibrant community arts sector;
- a major science museum;
- numerous and varied ethnic community cultural festivals on an annual basis; and
- a range of recreational facilities, including ‘state of the art’ community swimming facilities and the like.

Issues

Issues relating to tourism, arts, culture and recreation in Melbourne’s Western Region include:

- There is a perception that under-developed tourism product and if further developed and could generate significant job opportunities.
- It is believed that the west needs some iconic arts and culture projects. Building an understanding among both the region’s people and the wider Melbourne population that the region does have significant culture and art is important.
- Much of the visitation to the region may be more recreational than tourist in nature, however this is a somewhat moot point if recreational attractions are drawing visitors from outside the region.
- A focus on cultural development is essential.

- The Western Region needs some iconic arts and culture projects. Building an understanding among both the region's people and the wider Melbourne population that the region does have significant culture and art is important.
- Taking a regional approach to the planning and development of major recreation facilities would bring financial savings, allow the development of better facilities and reduce duplication.

Strategic Ideas

A number of strategies to build *tourism* product in the region are identified in the regional tourism strategy, including:

- building on existing tourism product strengths, to achieve recognition for natural attractions, events of international and national appeal and interpretation and access to heritage product of state and national significance;
- development of a strong tourism organisation, representing the tourism industry across the region, that is recognized and respected at metropolitan, State and national levels;
- establishment of strong and broadly-based relationships within the tourism industry in the region, through opportunities for co-operative marketing, co-ordination of product development and familiarisation with tourism product in the region;
- through the efforts of the regional tourism organisation and local government, establishment of effective tourism associations at the local level;
- progressive and increased involvement by industry players, taking over from the leadership initially shown by the six municipalities;
- widespread community support for the tourism industry, through better understanding and awareness of the economic, employment and social benefits of tourism to the region;
- establishment of infrastructure along the length of the Maribyrnong River, at Werribee South and at Williamstown foreshore, that facilitates public access to the water and the development of associated tourism product;
- improvements to infrastructure supporting major attractions and event venues to increase capacity;
- significant increase in capital investment in tourism product and infrastructure with a target of \$250 million in expenditure over the next 10 years;
- a recognition by Victorians that the region has significant natural attractions and natural beauty, and is a desirable place to visit;
- increased visitation to the region during the week and during the winter months, whilst maintaining visitation during peak periods;
- progressive conversion of a proportion of daytrips to overnight stays in the region with a target of a 50% increase in overnight visitors staying in the region over the next 10 years; and
- a balanced approach to future tourism development having regard to maintain environmental and heritage values in the Western Melbourne region.

With regard to arts, culture and recreation, the following deserves consideration:

- VU research highlights that investment in the creative and performing arts has the potential to improve the opportunities and facilities available to western communities and create an attractive environment for a broader range of high skilled workers.
- The 2004 *State of the Regions* report argues “to be a successful knowledge based region, regions need to have a high concentration of high skilled global knowledge workers. These workers tend to migrate to regions with scale and diversity of social and community infrastructure and cultural and lifestyle choices”. Therefore it is important that the Western Region develops a ‘lifestyle’ strategy that will enable it to deliver such choices to prospective residents.

2.7 Environment and Planning

Within this category there are two key themes: urban growth and the environment.

These issues are considered to be very significant by stakeholders and have also been addressed in a number of studies. At the regional level these include:

- Growing Western Melbourne Together;
- Community Regeneration in Melbourne’s West? and
- Melbourne’s West Area Consultative Committee Strategic Regional Plan 2004 - 2007.

At State government level, the *Melbourne 2030 Metropolitan Strategy* and proposed *Western Region Housing Statement* are key documents.

Urban Growth

By far the most pressing issue is managing the massive amount of urban growth occurring in the region.

Melbourne’s urban growth patterns are changing. The western region and to a lesser degree the northern region have now overtaken the southeast corridor as the fastest growing metropolitan regions. Melton’s growth rate is now the highest in Victoria. Growth is being fuelled by new household formation and a trend for inner western residents to relocate to the outer parts of the region to enjoy space and lifestyle.

The extent of this growth is outlined in the document *Household & Population Growth in the Western Region & Wyndham* prepared by the City of Wyndham and attached to this Appendix.

With respect to this urban growth, the key issues are:

- A belief by western region local governments that state government agencies do not recognise or comprehend the scale of this growth and its implications.
- Transport and community services infrastructure, which is already inadequate, need to be massively upgraded and expanded to match the growth, but State government responses to this challenge are inadequate.
- Residential growth demand is resulting in pressure to rezone industrial land for residential development, which would further erode the supply of industrial land at a time when the region desperately needs to increase its employment to balance population growth.

- The quality of residential subdivisions has increased significantly in recent years, helping to change the image of the west. This has the potential to attract higher socio-economic groups to settle in the region and may in turn stimulate the development of high quality office development, which is conspicuously absent from the region.
- The *Western Region Housing Statement* has suffered long delays and there remain questions about what it will deliver.
- The *Melbourne 2030* urban growth boundaries have the potential to influence housing and land prices with resultant effects on social equity. What happens in Melton and Wyndham will have a major flow-on effect to the inner west.
- The crucial relationship between land use planning and transport infrastructure is not adequately addressed in the region.
- In terms of coastal development, there are no clear planning strategies to deal with the interface issues of waterfront development.

The Environment

Historically, the Western Region has been home to a range of industrial activities, including a number that have been considered 'dirty' including live stock saleyards and abattoirs (many years ago), and more recently, significant petrochemical operations, including oil refineries.

This historical industrialisation of the western region has bred a pattern of environmental degradation, which is evident in land management, rivers and streams and in visual pollution.

However despite this, the region has always had a number of environmental assets, including world-renowned wetlands with abundant bird life and significant geological formations of interest.

The Maribyrnong River environmentally has been a "poor cousin" to the Yarra River.

Political awareness and activism on "green" issues tends to be greater in Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay than in the outer three municipalities, being more gentrified, inner area communities who are prepared to pay more for the environment. The three inner Councils are also at the "bottom" end of the catchments and therefore suffer the downstream effects of environmental pollution more severely.

Stakeholders believe that improving the West's environment will have significant positive impacts on public health and on the psychological sense of well-being of the community, as well as the more obvious enhancement of the physical image, which in turn attracts investment.

Most western region Councils are participating in the *Cities for Climate Protection Program* and the *Sustainability Street* program auspiced by Environs Australia. The latter program's philosophy is based on using environmental improvements as a focus for building community and neighbourhood. Yarraville has been cited as a good example of this approach.

Some key issues identified by stakeholders include:

- Stakeholders say there is not a high level of regional co-ordination on environmental issues; and no regional mechanism for getting environmental issues "on the agenda". Thus there is a need for a regional mechanism to enable this to occur.

- Landfill sites in the western region are more plentiful than in other regions due to the availability of land, which has led to a more complacent attitude towards materials recovery and recycling.
- There is a view that the disaggregation of the water industry into regional water companies and separation of parks responsibilities into Parks Victoria has resulted in a disintegration in the approach to bio-diversity and “whole of catchment” issues. While it was intended that the creation of Catchment Management Authorities would address this issue, there is a perception that CMAs have been inadequately resourced.
- The Western Plains lack the “wildlife corridors” enjoyed by the east (such as through Ringwood, Warrandyte and Eltham) and there are opportunities to create such corridors by extensive tree planting along existing rail and road transport corridors.
- There are opportunities for significant water re-use from the Werribee treatment plant.
- The region is in a rain shadow compared to the rest of Melbourne; and thus new approaches to landscaping need to be developed to respond to this situation.
- There are many opportunities for improving environmental amenity by “sprucing up” public infrastructure to create a greater feeling of pride and prosperity.
- The region faces big challenges with waste generation, biodiversity and global warming.

3. Conclusions

There is a remarkable degree of convergence between the issues identified during the consultations and those identified in the studies reviewed.

This augurs well for the region with regard to gaining general agreement and acceptance for future directions and goals for the region.

However, each of the studies reviewed was commissioned by a different organisation, yet almost all covered very similar ground, suggesting that there is considerable duplication of effort and more importantly, little communication between the various regional players, leading to fragmentation.

Successful regions are those where all the players - whether they be from the public, private and not for profit sector - can work together to achieve their goals.

Finally, it is significant that many of the reports and many stakeholders interviewed believed that the solutions to many of the region’s problems lay in the hands of external parties, including State and Commonwealth governments. While this is a reality to some extent, it is vital for the region to accept that it’s future prosperity and destiny is to a great extent in its own hands and reliant on the willingness of the region’s stakeholders to work together.