

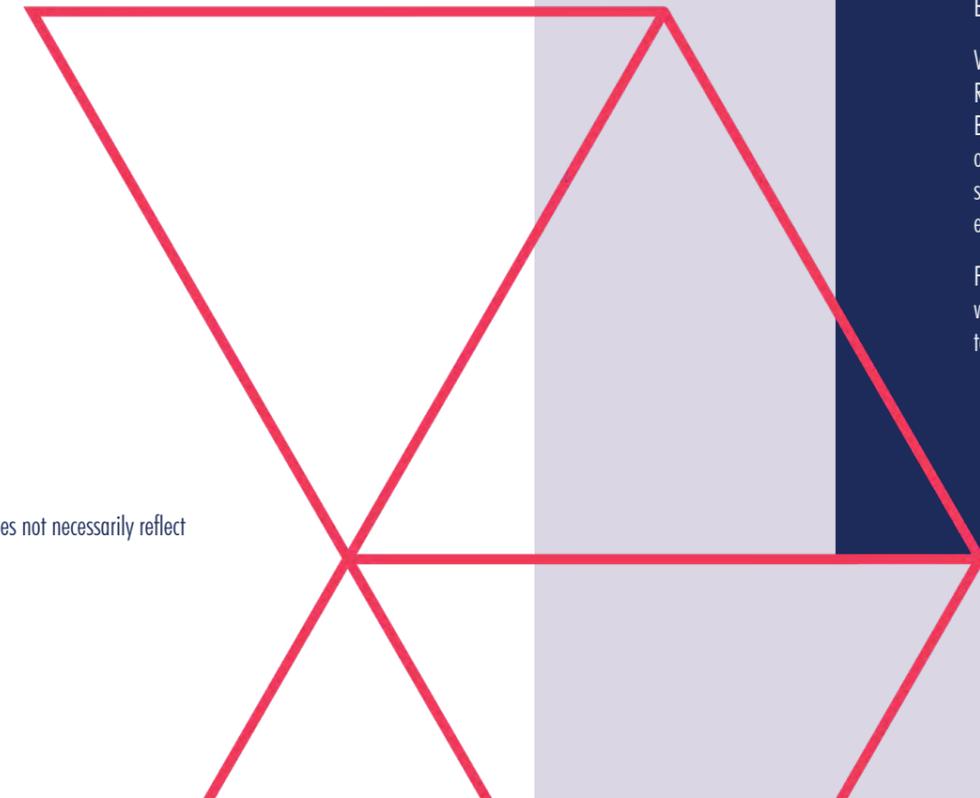


WESTERN GROWTH

UNLOCKING MELBOURNE'S ECONOMIC ENGINE

Strategic Foundations Paper to Initiate the Western Growth Dialogue to Supercharge the Economic and Social Future of Melbourne's West

WoMEDA
WEST OF MELBOURNE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE INC



WoMEDA

WEST OF MELBOURNE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE INC

Disclaimer:

This is a paper of WoMEDA and does not necessarily reflect the views of all its members.

Acknowledgement of Country

The West of Melbourne Economic Development Alliance (WoMEDA) acknowledges the Wurundjeri, Bunurong and Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. We honour and deeply respect their Ancestors, Elders, and families past, present and emerging. We recognise the rich ongoing cultural, social and spiritual connections that First Nations peoples have with the lands and waters of the West of Melbourne and beyond.

About WoMEDA

WoMEDA is an alliance of significant institutions operating across the West of Melbourne, working in tandem with local government and engaging with industry. WoMEDA aims to develop and champion strategies that foster regional collaboration, sustainable economic development, greater local job opportunities, increased wellbeing for community members, and promote synergistic and innovative employment precincts.

Note on the definition of West of Melbourne

There is no formally agreed definition of the 'West of Melbourne'.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) classifies 'Melbourne - West' as an area of 1410 square kilometres covering the entirety of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Hobsons Bay, Wyndham, Maribyrnong, the greater majority of Brimbank and Melton, and a small portion of Moorabool.

Victorian Government departments alternatively use the 'Western Metropolitan Region' for statistical purposes. This comprises the LGAs of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham. The area has large overlaps with the ABS definition but with the inclusion of Moonee Valley, the small portion of Brimbank which is not included in that definition, and the exclusion of a small portion of Moorabool.

For much of this document references to the 'West of Melbourne' will accord with the ABS definition. The notable exception is for the population projections to 2051, where Victorian Government forecasts are shared.

Foreword

Population growth in Melbourne's West is the fastest in Australia. It will soon pass one million and will be 1.8 million by 2051. Australia's economic future critically depends on ensuring that this booming population leads to a booming economy. WoMEDA's vision is for a prosperous future where the West of Melbourne is a beacon of jobs, opportunity, liveability and sustainable growth. How do we unlock Melbourne's economic engine? This will have wider benefits for Victoria and Australia.

As well as the West's young, multicultural and increasingly skilled workforce, the West of Melbourne's unique assets includes the Port of Melbourne, and two airports, Tullamarine and Avalon, around its boundary, and critical logistics infrastructure inside its region. These human and physical assets provide the basis for a booming economy.

This Paper lays out the strategic foundations that will enable this future vision to be realised. We identify six pillars: city building, transport, jobs and skills, industry, liveability, and economic and social inclusion.

The core challenge is that too high a proportion of workers from the West commute out of the region to work, which in turn places intense pressure on the region's transport infrastructure. We explore two main solutions. First, more public and private investments in the West's employment precincts, to grow local jobs. Second, investment in public transport to help reduce excessive commuting times out of the region, and to promote shorter commutes within the region to the employment precincts.

Around these core strategies will need to be a city building plan, an industry plan, a skills plan, a liveability plan and an economic and social inclusion plan. We identify priorities in each of these areas that need to be addressed.

This Paper is being launched at our West of Melbourne Summit, in partnership with The Age. We thank the extraordinary array of experts and leaders from government, industry and academia who will lead the discussion at the Summit. We see this as the start of a dialogue with all levels of government and key stakeholders from industry and the community. Indeed, at the Summit we are launching the Western Growth Dialogue.

WoMEDA is an incorporated association of the West's five municipalities and three of its anchor institutions: Victoria University, Western Health and Greater Western Water. By establishing the Western Growth Dialogue we will bring in the corporate sector and community organisations, to foster this important discussion, along with all levels of government.

I wish to thank all our board members for shaping this paper and our economic advisor Mary Clarke, of DXP Consulting, for the amazing work she has done in drafting it. It has been a great pleasure working with her in that process.

The development of this Paper started with the release of a consultation paper ten months ago. Extensive feedback from a range of organisations and individual's was extremely helpful. We now look forward to a stimulating and productive discussion about how to achieve that prosperous future of our vision. We are optimistic that this Paper will make a significant contribution towards that vision being realised.

Peter Dawkins AO
Chair, WoMEDA
October 2025

&

Emeritus Professor of Economics
Mitchell Institute,
Victoria University

Summary of WoMEDA's Key Commitments and Requests

Commitments

WoMEDA commits to:

1. Collaborating with Invest Victoria in attracting private sector investment into Melbourne's West through:
 - a West of Melbourne Investment Attraction Roundtable
 - the development of an Investment Attraction Strategy and Prospectus, with a focus on key strategic industries which, amongst others, include the Victorian Government priority sectors of advanced manufacturing, circular economy, digital technologies, and food and agribusiness
2. Supporting the Victorian Government in the development and implementation of plans for priority precincts in the West of Melbourne, with a central focus on growing the number of local jobs in the region and an associated focus of enhancing amenities in and around the precincts to make them attractive places to live, work and play
3. Establishing the Western Growth Dialogue to promote a dialogue between key stakeholders in industry, the community and local, State and Commonwealth Governments about key priorities for Melbourne's West under the six pillars of this Strategic Foundations Paper:
 - city building
 - transport
 - jobs and skills
 - industry
 - liveability
 - economic and inclusion
4. Refining the priorities under the six pillars in three above in light of the Western Growth Dialogue and associated discussions with local, State and Federal Governments

Requests

WoMEDA welcomes the commitments that the State Government has made to establishing priority precincts in Melbourne's West, and enhancing the West's infrastructure assets. For example, in transport infrastructure we look forward to the opening of the Metro Tunnel and the Westgate Tunnel. We are also delighted by the commitment to proceed with the Airport Rail Link, and the substantial funding that the State and Commonwealth Governments have committed to that project, including the Sunshine super-hub. Given the huge population growth that is occurring and is forecast for the years ahead, and the strategic importance of leveraging that population growth for the benefit of the West of Melbourne, Victorian and Australian economies, this Strategic Foundations Paper puts forward a range of proposals for all levels of government to consider.

WoMEDA requests that:

1. State Government
 - a. commits to the ongoing development of priority precinct plans for East Werribee, Footscray and Sunshine, with a central focus on growing the number of local jobs in the region, and an associated focus on enhancing amenities in and around the precincts to make them attractive places to live, work and play
 - b. gives serious consideration to the establishment of a fourth priority precinct in Melbourne's West at Cobblebank (in Melton)
 - c. works with WoMEDA in the development of a Jobs and Skills Plan for the West of Melbourne to identify how the education and training system, in partnership with industry, can ensure that the West of Melbourne's growing workforce has the knowledge, skills and capabilities to meet the needs of industry and help grow productivity and labour force participation
2. Noting the importance of progressing all aspects of the existing Western Rail Plan, State Government works with the Commonwealth Government to
 - a. fully fund the Airport Rail Link and to progress with urgency towards a full and timely completion
 - b. advance the planning of the Suburban Rail Loop (West)
3. State Government explores with WoMEDA how to establish mechanisms whereby the full range of issues and priorities canvassed in this Strategic Foundations Paper can be discussed, as part of the Western Growth Dialogue, with relevant State and Commonwealth Ministers and government agencies

Executive Summary

Context and Drivers

By 2050, 1.8 million people will call the West of Melbourne home. This is almost twice the size it was in 2021, much larger than the current size of Adelaide, and as big as the last Census count for the whole of South Australia. It underscores the strategic importance of leveraging the growth for the benefit of the West of Melbourne, Victorian and Australian economies.

The West of Melbourne is one of the most multiculturally diverse regions in Australia. This is a big asset to be leveraged in relation to economic dynamism and social and cultural richness.

The proportion of the population in employment has been growing strongly over the last decade, but so too has the proportion of people who need to commute out of the region to their place of work. This trend is expected to continue, unless there is a step change in the way that governments and business think about this region. More than half of the workers from the West are projected to be commuting out of the region by 2034.

A big productivity opportunity is the growth in the region's skilled and credentialled young workers. While the average qualification level of the West of Melbourne's workforce has not yet reached the Greater Melbourne average, it is well on its way. A further opportunity is to harness the collective strength of complementary industries, attracting private investment and provide the public infrastructure that will assist.

WoMEDA's vision is for a more prosperous future where the West of Melbourne is a beacon of jobs, opportunity, liveability and sustainable growth.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the State and Commonwealth Governments need to re-conceptualise the West of Melbourne as a major state and national priority for city-building.

With this in mind, WoMEDA puts forward Western Growth - a six-pillared Strategic Foundations Paper - that invites all levels of government and stakeholders in industry and in the community to be part of a Western Growth Dialogue with WoMEDA focused on key priorities under the pillars of:

- I. City-Building
- II. Transport
- III. Jobs and Skills
- IV. Industry
- V. Liveability
- VI. Economic and Social Inclusion

The priorities under these six pillars will be refined in light of this Dialogue and associated discussions with local, State and Commonwealth Governments.

WoMEDA requests that, as part of this Dialogue, the State Government establishes a mechanism where the full range of issues canvassed can be discussed with relevant State and Commonwealth Ministers and government agencies.

The Six Pillars

Pillar I City-Building

Continue to prioritise precincts

At the core of WoMEDA's inaugural West of Melbourne Economic Development Strategy was three precincts - Footscray, Sunshine and East Werribee. Back then, in 2017, WoMEDA believed that building strong local hubs of employment will benefit the whole region. This continues to be our belief.

This Strategic Foundations Paper strengthens and builds on the original core by putting forward reforms, for further discussion, designed to create jobs and sustain the growth and liveability of all of Melbourne's West.

Recognise Cobblebank as a priority precinct

The other way it builds on the core is by suggesting that serious consideration be given to a fourth priority precinct - Cobblebank, in the large and fast growing LGA of Melton. Cobblebank is growing at 'breakneck speed', and is already home to large live initiatives including the future Melton Hospital and a new TAFE.

Shape Wyndham and Melton into satellite cities

With the huge past and projected future growth that has occurred in the populations of Wyndham and Melton, both should be shaped to become highly functional satellite cities of Melbourne by 2050 with sufficient employment and amenity.

We propose that future city planning should include an agreed set of principles and criteria about the features of a highly functional satellite city for Melbourne, that helps shape the future development of Wyndham and Melton, with support from all three tiers of government.

Plan for Sunshine to become Melbourne's second CBD

Similarly, just like Parramatta became Sydney's second Central Business District (CBD), consideration should be given to a plan for Sunshine to become Melbourne's second CBD by 2050. Sunshine is the only existing precinct in Melbourne that is recognised as a Metropolitan Activity Centre, an Employment and Innovation Precinct, a Priority Precinct and a Transport super hub. Its connectivity to the satellite cities of Melton and Wyndham as well as Melbourne's CBD, will be a critical element in its future planning.

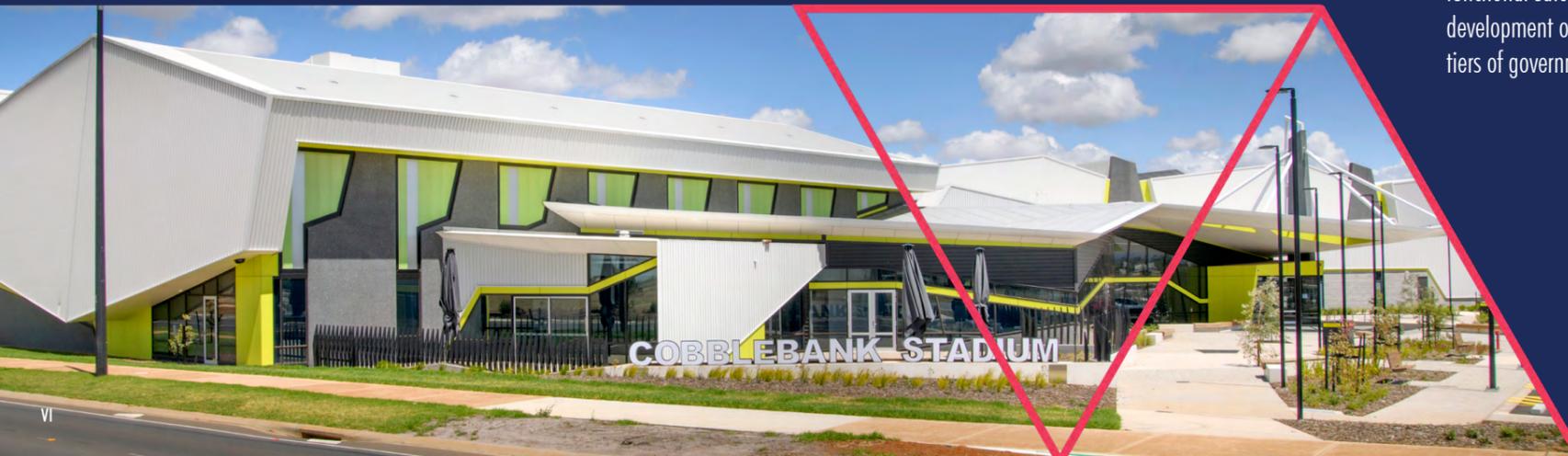
The development of the Sunshine super hub and the Airport Rail Link (ARL) make Sunshine the natural hub around which to build Melbourne's second CBD. It is the natural alternative to Melbourne's CBD for such things as head offices of major corporations, for government offices, and a convention centre.

Elevate the roles Hobsons Bay plays

Hobsons Bay also has important roles to play in the future vision of the West of Melbourne.

It will benefit from the revitalisation of the West of Melbourne's industrial zone proposed as a priority under the Industry pillar.

The LGA also has a role to play in the West of Melbourne's visitor economy strategy with its important waterfront assets, including the potential to invest in developing Scienceworks, and the maritime precinct in Williamstown.



Pillar II Transport

The West of Melbourne's massive population growth and excessive levels of commuting is putting a huge strain on the transport infrastructure and services. It is important to take pressure off by increasing local employment. But under any plausible scenario, population growth in the region will continue to place additional pressure on the transport system. WoMEDA welcomes the State Government's investments in the West's transport infrastructure. We look forward to the opening of the Metro Tunnel and the Westgate Tunnel. Looking ahead, we put forward three proposals for further discussion, namely to: expedite and expand the Western Rail Plan, design better bus services, and put the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road (OMR) back on the agenda.

Expedite and expand the Western Rail Plan

There is a State Government endorsed Western Rail Plan. Key elements include: the Sunshine station super hub, the ARL, electrification of the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines, and the Werribee line extension.

Welcome developments earlier this year were the pledges of funding from both levels of Government for the ARL including the Sunshine super hub. This is not merely pivotal to the ARL, but to other elements of the Plan designed to better connect the West.

The problems that remain are that the timing of some key elements are 'up in the air', and the ambition is not as great as it once was.

This includes the full funding and timing of the ARL which is needed to support the movements of a projected doubling of passengers over the next two decades. WoMEDA requests that the State Government works with the Commonwealth Government to fully fund the ARL and progress with urgency towards a full and timely completion.

Electrification and duplication of both the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines are essential to address capacity and congestion issues on existing V/Line services. WoMEDA recognises that progress is being made, and encourage progress to continue as speedily as possible.

An added way to relieve congestion is to extend the Werribee metro line to connect with the Wyndham Vale line. However, the lack of any confirmation that this extension will go ahead leaves the Wyndham commuters with no foreseeable solution.

Missing from the Western Rail Plan is the most western leg of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), which is to run from Sunshine to Werribee. It complements the ARL and enables those travelling along the leg to extend their journeys in all directions via the Sunshine station super hub. WoMEDA requests that the State Government advances the planning of the SRL West.

Design better bus services

There is little point in growing jobs in the precincts or providing better rail connections between activity centres and Melbourne's CBD if people in Melbourne's West struggle to connect with either. The limited coverage, infrequency, and roundabout routes of current bus services is forcing households to suffer either protracted commute times or the financial burden of owning and running multiple cars. By international standards, public transport accessibility in Melbourne's West is very low.

A clean slate simple grid network of direct bus services across the West, developed by Melbourne University academics, could provide more frequent services with little impact on operational costs. The trade-off would be a slightly longer walk for some to their nearest bus stop.

A more recent pragmatic proposal under development that integrates current services would require additional funding. But it would be money well spent. Reform is essential to match population growth and restore equity with the rest of Melbourne.

Put the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road (OMR) back on the agenda

The OMR is vital infrastructure, especially given the expansion of the Port and the projected increase in freight container traffic on trucks. Putting the OMR back on the agenda and firming up on its timing and funding would provide business with the confidence to commit resources to planned investments in the West.

Pillar III Jobs and Skills

Expedite West of Melbourne Precinct Plans to grow jobs in the region

A major objective of this Strategic Foundations Paper is to grow jobs in the priority precincts of Footscray, Sunshine, East Werribee and Cobblebank. Precinct-focused initiatives undertaken since 2017 are fuelling future jobs and growth within each. Proposed here for further discussion are new opportunities that sustain progress.

- In Footscray, its new hospital, co-located with Victoria University (VU), is due to open its doors soon, creating over 250 new local jobs and a hub of health and learning. Plans to revitalise the Footscray CBD, including the Creative West project, will add to the precinct's vitality and appeal. As too would establishing a landmark gallery and cultural hub of international standing. Low hanging fruit is for greater activation around the Whitten Oval.
- The Commonwealth and State Governments' funding commitments to the Sunshine station super hub will see the precinct bustle as a commercial centre and with civic life. If the Commonwealth and/or State Governments and private business were to establish a presence within the precinct, the experiences of Parramatta suggest that this could provide a powerful catalyst for others to follow.

There is an urgent need to ramp up the precinct's capacity to cater for the much inflated numbers anticipated to commute to or through the precinct. The Vietnamese Museum, currently under construction, and the proposed Sunshine Energy Park, provide visitors with enticements to stay. A major conference centre could provide a further lure to business visitors.

- In East Werribee, staffing the Wyndam Law Courts will provide employment opportunities for local legal and other justice professionals and administrative workers. A new opportunity is the Werribee Skills Accelerator, which VU has been working with Government Ministers to realise through collaboration and co-location with other TAFE providers. Another is to build on the precinct's allure as a place to visit by seeking out and exploring major new attractions. A third is to leverage water recycling and reuse for technology innovations.
- Cobblebank is already home to three significant live initiatives: the Melton Hospital, Melton TAFE, and the Western Business Accelerator and Centre of Excellence (BACE). The neighbouring Melton City Centre has received Commonwealth funding support for establishing a university Study Hub. The exciting challenge is to maintain and build the momentum.

WoMEDA requests that the State Government commits to the ongoing development of priority precinct plans for East Werribee, Footscray and Sunshine, with a central focus on growing the number of local jobs in the region, and an associated focus on enhancing amenities in an around the precincts to make them attractive places to live, work and play. In turn, WoMEDA commits to supporting the Government in the development and implementation of these plans.

Revitalise the West of Melbourne industrial zone

The West of Melbourne also includes a major zone of state significant industrial land which covers parts of Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Hobsons Bay. The zone is close to, and would benefit from, the Sunshine and Footscray priority precincts.

The zone is in transition as sites formerly used for traditional manufacturing are being repurposed.

The proposed establishment of the Western Intermodal Freight Terminal (WIFT) would be an important extension of the industrial zone. This would increase productivity by moving freight more quickly to its required destination and improve the quality of life for Melbourne's population by taking trucks off suburban roads.



Develop a Jobs and Skills Plan to better match the labour force with jobs

Many in the West of Melbourne's large workforce have to travel outside the region to work. That should in itself represent an incentive for businesses to locate in the region as, in general, workers prefer to work closer to home to avoid unnecessary commuting times.

A 2022 study by VU on skills and jobs in the West of Melbourne identified four priorities for better matching the current and future labour force with the available jobs:

- Create a local skills ecosystem where skill formation occurs in place-based settings with employers, through enhanced relationships between industry, education providers and individuals.
- Facilitate a culture of innovation across employers and education providers to collaborate in redesigning jobs, course content and how training is delivered.
- Enhance engagement between education providers and industry, ensuring that students are instilled with the skills and capabilities that employers need.
- Build capacity for educational institutions to be hubs of industry collaboration, responding to industry need, sparking innovation and providing initial and continuing training through robust partnerships.

These remain robust proposals that warrant further discussion. The policy environment is showing increasing signs of being conducive to this approach given the elevated importance of skills for productivity and tertiary harmonisation.

The presence of a major dual sector university in the West of Melbourne, VU, with a commitment to working closely with industry, along with a number of other tertiary providers, provides a strong basis for better matching the current and future labour force with the available jobs.

WoMEDA invites the State Government to collaborate on the development a Jobs and Skills Plan for the West of Melbourne, to identify how the education and training system, in partnership with industry, can ensure that the West of Melbourne's growing workforce has the knowledge, skills and capabilities to meet the needs of industry and help grow productivity and labour force participation.

Pillar IV Industry

Modern industrial policy actively informs and shapes markets rather than passively corrects failures. Three ways to do this are to promote industry clusters, leverage the region's multiculturalism, and develop and implement an investment attraction strategy.

Promote industry clusters

The opportunities to create jobs within the precincts discussed above just scrape the surface of possibilities. The even bigger opportunity is to couch them in broader industry cluster policies linked to the precincts in tandem with the Jobs and Skills pillar. Place-based industry cluster policies are targeted — focusing on key industries within a cluster — and transformational — actively reshaping markets along new development paths.

Candidate foci for industry cluster policies in the precincts for further exploration and consideration are:

- Health, education and R and D — The health and wellbeing industry cluster in Sunshine is a huge success. Werribee provides exemplars of clustered wrap around health services for population cohorts, such as women. Opportunity abounds in both Footscray and Melton to develop clustered services around their new hospitals.
- Business services — Locating more business services in the precincts would enable providers to capitalise on an increasingly professionalised and youthful workforce, particularly in Sunshine and Footscray.
- Advanced manufacturing — By putting latent capacity back to work, advanced manufacturing could be a source of revitalisation in locations impacted by the decline in traditional manufacturing.
- Food manufacturing and agribusiness - The future is particularly 'bright' for advanced food manufacturing in Werribee.
- Data centres, IT and electrotechnology — An abundance of affordable land, a water recycling facility, VU's expertise in green energy and the Western Skills Accelerator make East Werribee a strong candidate to co-locate data centres. Another option is the West of Melbourne industrial zone.
- Circular economy — Melbourne West's twin pressures of a hot and dry climate and burgeoning population growth are strong motivators to become a cleaner and more circular economy. West of Melbourne businesses should have prioritised access to the national funding available under the Future Made in Australia fund for initiatives that move us closer towards net zero.

- Transport and logistics — As home to Melbourne's major seaport and two airports, and a gateway to the CBD, major regions and other States, it is unsurprising that transport and logistics is already big in Melbourne's West. The pipeline of transport infrastructure investments and the WIFT, discussed separately above, suggest the potential for it to be even bigger.

- Creative industries — There is huge potential for the West of Melbourne's creative industries to drive economic growth, boost tourism and create local jobs. The region is already home to flourishing cultural and creative attractions, particularly in Footscray. Others are in the pipeline, and more are floated in this Strategic Foundations Paper.

- Visitor economy — There is a golden opportunity to grow the visitor economy of Melbourne's West for local value capture and, with it, jobs. Werribee, for example, has much to entice visitors to stay.

Leverage multiculturalism and associated entrepreneurship

With one out of three small business owners born outside of Australia, the West of Melbourne is fortunate to have a large share of migrants. One need only to walk along the streets of the precincts to experience the associated entrepreneurship and economic dynamism of their multicultural inhabitants. Migrant enterprises have an outsized impact on their communities through their investment in training programs and a high rate of migrant employment.

Develop and implement an investment attraction strategy

The West of Melbourne has a large, growing, youthful and increasingly skilled population who want to work, and an abundance of greenfield land available at affordable prices. However, little of this is well known. Worse still, Melbourne's West continues to suffer from the perception that it is a less than prestigious place to invest. More needs to be done to address the information gaps, counter prevailing negative stereotypes and build the identity of the West as a place to invest. WoMEDA will continue to play its part. We commit to collaborating with Invest Victoria to attract private investment into Melbourne's West through an Investment Attraction Roundtable, and the development of an Investment Attraction Strategy and Prospectus, focused on key strategic industries.

Beyond information gaps and misconceptions, two further barriers to tackle in the context of an investment strategy are the practice of landbanking, and deficiency of public infrastructure, notably essential services.

Pillar V Liveability

Two of the West of Melbourne's claims to fame are that rapid growth means that it is destined to become Greater Melbourne's most populated region by the next Census, and that it is warmer and drier than the other regions in the area. Both risk undermining liveability within the region unless deliberate and anticipatory action is taken. Under this pillar, WoMEDA puts forward priority foci for further discussion.

Caring for Country

Throughout Melbourne's West, our Councils and anchor institutions all have a significant commitment to the First Nations theme of Caring for Country. They work closely with First Nations leaders to advance it. It is a fundamental principle that WoMEDA is also committed to. As WoMEDA pursues its Western Growth Dialogue, this will continue to be an important underpinning principle.

Plan regionally for sufficient and diverse housing stock and essential services

More houses are needed to accommodate the West of Melbourne's expanding population, including affordable and social housing. In addition to the barriers that plague housing supply nationally, supply is also hampered by landbanking, stalled investments due to uncertainties regarding the timing and delivery of promised catalytic developments, the cost of remediating contaminated land, and a lack essential services, such as water. WoMEDA recommends all levels of government to work together to plan regionally for a more sufficient and diverse housing stock and essential services tailored to the unique needs of the region.

Promote the sustainability of the environment

The West of Melbourne's dual challenges of climate and population means that it is environmentally vulnerable. There is a clear need to promote the sustainability of the environment. The good news is that there are many great collaborative initiatives already in play to increase the tree canopy, conserve water and otherwise promote sustainability. They should be supported and built upon.

Provide greater amenities for sport

The benefits of community sport are many and extend into all facets of life. Yet participation in sports in the West is low relative to other regions. The inadequate sufficiency and quality of the sporting infrastructure is a big reason why. While investment has improved in recent years, a significant gap remains to bring the West's infrastructure up to standard.

Enable lifelong learning

As the population of Melbourne's West grows, the challenge is to support the learning of all — school-aged children, the further education of school leavers, and the upskilling and reskilling of workers. While new schools are being built, the need for more schools is immediate and continuing. The outer West is also where official projections are predicting a large increase in demand for tertiary training, particularly in the areas of construction and health. Melton's new TAFE will be instrumental in meeting the demands of residents in the LGA. In Wyndham, Infrastructure Victoria has specifically called for the expansion of VU's Werribee TAFE facilities to train more students and fill skill gaps. To facilitate work and the continuous learning, particularly given Melbourne West's more youthful workers, rolling over public funding of the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) operating in the region will be important.

Plan regionally for better childcare and health services

The age structure of Melbourne's West is young, yet the outer West is characterised by childcare 'deserts'. Access to childcare is a basic right that should not be dependent on postcode. Likewise, parents' choice to work should not be constrained by the absence of these services.

Nor should their ability to work be compromised by any lack of access to quality health services for either themselves or their dependents. However, access is not automatic given the demographics and complexity of the region's health care needs. Two out of every five residents go outside the region to meet their health care needs. Meeting and managing current and future demand requires a greater focus on preventative health, better connected and more integrated services and expansion of services. Planning needs to occur at the regional level.

Pillar VI Economic and Social Inclusion

Inclusive growth ensures that all residents can participate in and contribute to the economy and society, and reap the benefits of greater prosperity. A planned approach to economic and social inclusion is especially important in the West of Melbourne because of the region's demographics and economic transition. Challenges of relatively low and uneven educational attainment, high youth unemployment, and pockets of serious place-based disadvantage need to be overcome.

Address relatively low and uneven education attainment

The West of Melbourne has a lower overall level of educational attainment than Greater Melbourne. While attainment is high in some LGAs, such as Maribyrnong, it is very low in others, such as in Brimbank and Melton. Initiatives designed to bridge the gaps, such as continued investment in VU's St Albans campus, would not merely support economic and social inclusion, they would fuel productivity gains.

Bring down youth unemployment

The West's youngest workers, many of whom will have recently entered the labour market for the first time, are struggling the most to secure jobs. This is a situation that has gone from bad to worse as the 'age gap' between labour market outcomes for youth workers and their more senior peers has widened. More needs to be done to provide jobs for all, including supporting the work of LLENs and having a pointed focus on youth under the Jobs and Skills pillar.

Tackle pockets of serious place-based disadvantage

The West of Melbourne also has significant pockets of serious place-based disadvantage. Tackling disadvantage needs to focus on initiatives contemplated under the Liveability pillar. In places of entrenched, intergenerational, multiple and complex disadvantage, a coordinated place-based approach is encouraged, as this is a wicked problem, which will not go away without deliberate strategies.

These pillars are practical and exciting opportunities to realise significant economic growth for the West of Melbourne; shining a spotlight on the potential of what will be Melbourne's most heavily populated region over coming decades. While WoMEDA is alert to the State and Federal Government's fiscal pressures, the cost of deferral is not zero. It is large. It is congested roads with all the associated negatives just mentioned. It is also the opportunity cost of planned investments of individuals and private businesses that are put on ice or cancelled. Time typically adds to, rather than eases, expenses that must ultimately be incurred.

Table of Contents

Disclaimer	II
Acknowledgement of Country	III
About WoMEDA	III
Note on the definition of West of Melbourne	III
Foreword	IV
Summary of WoMEDA’s Key Commitments and Requests	V
Commitments	V
Requests	V
Executive Summary	VI
Context and Drivers	VI
The Six Pillars	VII
Introduction	1
Strategic framework	2
Pillar I City-Building	6
Continue to prioritise precincts	6
Recognise Cobblebank as a priority precinct	6
Shape Wyndham and Melton into satellite cities	6
Plan for Sunshine to become Melbourne’s second CBD	7
Elevate the roles Hobsons Bay plays	8
Pillar II Transport	9
Expedite and expand the Western Rail Plan	9
Design better bus services	12
Put the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road (OMR) back on the agenda	14
Pillar III Jobs and Skills	15
Expedite West of Melbourne Precinct Plans to grow jobs in the region	16
Revitalise the West of Melbourne industrial zone	20
Develop a Jobs and Skills Plan to better match the labour force with jobs	21
Pillar IV Industry	23
Promote industry clusters	23
Leverage multiculturalism and associated entrepreneurship	28
Develop and implement an investment attraction strategy	28
Pillar V Liveability	29
Caring for Country	29
Plan regionally for sufficient and diverse housing stock and essential services	29
Promote the sustainability of the environment	31
Provide greater amenities for sport	32
Enable lifelong learning	34
Plan regionally for better childcare and health services	35
Pillar VI Economic and Social Inclusion	37
Address relatively low and uneven education attainment	37
Bring down youth unemployment	38
Tackle pockets of serious place-based disadvantage	39

Appendix 1 - Feedback on the Consultation Paper	41
Appendix 2 – The 4Ps Driving Future Prospects	42
Population	42
Participation	43
Productivity	46
Place	47

Figures

Figure 1 Strategic framework	2
Figure 2 Actual and projected population in Metropolitan Melbourne	4
Figure 3 Western Rail Plan	11
Figure 4 Public transport in Greater Melbourne	12
Figure 5 Existing vs ‘clean slate’ bus network	13
Figure 6 Strategies and developments in the West of Melbourne	17
Figure 7 Strengths and opportunities in the precincts and their surrounding areas	18
Figure 8 Satellite image of the West of Melbourne	20
Figure 9 Sport participation rates in Metropolitan Melbourne in 2022	32
Figure 10 Projected growth in primary and secondary enrolments in government schools by 2036	34
Figure 11 Childcare ‘deserts’ in Melbourne’s West	35
Figure 12 ‘Age gap’ in the employment to population ratio	38
Figure 13 Relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in the West of Melbourne	39
Figure 14 Actual and projected populations in selected LGAs in Melbourne’s West	42
Figure 15 Dependency ratios	42
Figure 16 Cultural diversity	43
Figure 17 Employment of West of Melbourne residents by industry	44
Figure 18 Employment of West of Melbourne residents by major occupation	44
Figure 19 Employment growth, residents of the West by Industry and location of work, 2024-2034	45
Figure 20 UHI reading by LGA	48

Tables

Table 1 Strengths and weaknesses of the West of Melbourne’s foundations for growth	5
Table 2 Bus usage and car ownership by West of Melbourne residents	12
Table 3 Alternative scenarios for job growth in the precincts	16
Table 4 Candidate foci of industry cluster policies in the precincts and their surrounding areas	23
Table 5 Projected occupied private dwellings in Melbourne’s West	29
Table 6 Residents in Melbourne West’s LGAs with a Bachelor Degree or higher qualification	37
Table 7 Labour force status	43
Table 8 Highest non-school qualification held	46

Boxes

Box 1 Parramatta in Greater Western Sydney – a model for progress	7
---	---

Introduction

By 2050 the population of the West of Melbourne is forecast to have close to doubled its size at the last Census to 1.8 million. This growth should be leveraged for the benefit of the West and the Victorian and Australian economies.

However, on current trends, by 2034 more than half of the workers from the West are projected to be commuting out of the region to their places of work, with all the associated negative repercussions, such as time lost travelling, congested roads, rising emissions, and overburdened public transport services. Not to mention the missed opportunity to make best use of the people, land and other assets of the West.

In 2017, alert to these trends, WoMEDA published its inaugural West of Melbourne Economic Development Strategy. The focus was explicitly on strengthening employment in the West, as job growth was not matching population growth. Our concern then was that, absent that strategy, the West will become a dormitory.

That Strategy focused on three major employment precincts - Footscray, Sunshine and Werribee. While the West is much more than those precincts, our belief was that building strong local hubs of employment will generate widespread benefits for the region. Pleasingly the Government was listening. All three subsequently became officially endorsed precincts by the State Government. Significant investments have been made, such as construction of the new Footscray Hospital, Wyndham Law Courts, Metro Tunnel, Westgate Tunnel, and government schools across the region. The outcome has been a significant and welcome increase in economic activity and job growth.

Despite these gains, growth has been insufficient to absorb the workers of the West and about half of them continue to commute to roles outside of the region. It is becoming increasingly clear that the State and Commonwealth governments need to re-conceptualise the West of Melbourne as a major, state and national priority for city-building.

In December 2024 WoMEDA released a Consultation Paper, Towards an Economic Development Strategy for the West of Melbourne 2025 designed to test our thinking on what are the priority areas for action. Appendix 1 captures the overarching themes emerging from feedback received.

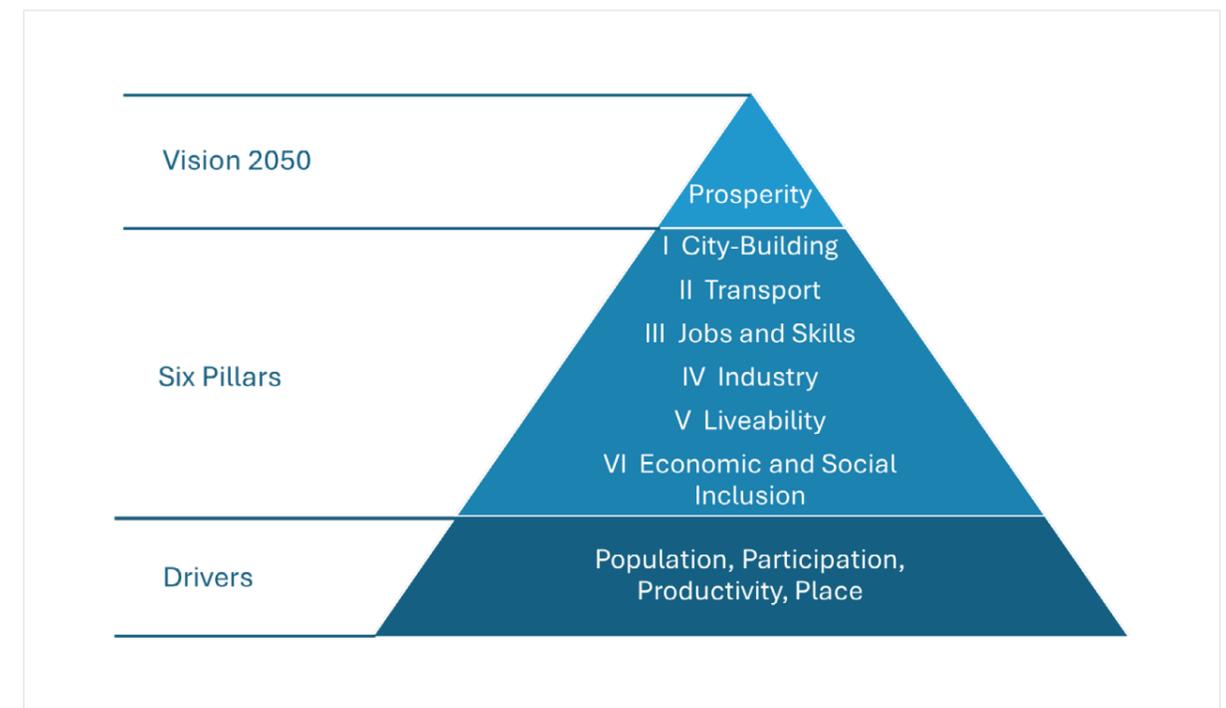
Westward Growth - Unlocking Melbourne's Economic Engine is a Strategic Foundations Paper that takes on board the feedback, subsequent developments and looks out to 2050. It is intended as a catalyst for further discussion on the issues and priorities raised within. Starting with the October 2025 West of Melbourne Summit. And continuing with the Western Growth Dialogue between key stakeholders in industry, the community and local, State and Commonwealth governments. The priorities identified within this Paper will be refined in light of these discussions.

WoMEDA requests that, as part of this Dialogue, the State Government establishes a mechanism where the full range of issues canvassed can be discussed with relevant State and Commonwealth Ministers and government agencies.

Strategic framework

Figure 1 captures the underpinning strategic framework. The vision is that by 2050 the West of Melbourne is prosperous - a beacon of jobs, opportunity, liveability, and sustainable growth.

Figure 1: Strategic framework



Vision 2050 – The West of Melbourne is Prosperous

By 2050, the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne is a bold and thriving region of 1.8 million people — almost twice the size it was in 2021, and as big as the Census count of South Australia’s population in that year. It is **Prosperous - a beacon of jobs, opportunity, liveability, and sustainable growth**. The benefits of prosperity are shared by all who live there.

At the heart of this positive future is a strong local economy, with two-thirds of employed residents working within the region.

The precincts of Footscray, Sunshine, East Werribee and Cobblebank and their surrounding areas are flourishing with jobs, economic activity and civic life. They are home to world class industry clusters in health, education and R and D; business services, advanced manufacturing, food manufacturing and agribusiness, data centres, IT and electrotechnology, the circular economy, transport and logistics, the creative industries, and the visitor economy. Each are having an outsized impact, creating jobs and growth in the precincts and beyond.

The large outer West LGAs of Wyndham and Melton, which continue to grow at a ‘rate of knots’, have transformed into genuine satellite cities. They are economic powerhouses with the employment and amenity you would expect from one of the world’s most liveable cities.

Sunshine, situated at the heart of the West, has become Melbourne’s second CBD. The relocation of corporate head offices and government agencies, together with a significant influx of private investment, has created 30,000 new jobs and attracted 43,000 new residents. People are travelling to Sunshine for work and leisure from the rest of the West, other metropolitan regions and further afield, taking advantage of frequent, reliable and well-connected train and bus services.

The West of Melbourne is one of the most multi-culturally diverse regions in Australia. This has proved to be a powerful asset, contributing to entrepreneurship, local job growth, economic dynamism and the social and cultural richness of the region.

So too is the region’s youthful and increasingly skilled workforce, who are eager to work. The local skills ecosystem, encompassing learners, education providers and industry, ensures the currency of learnings and relevancy to employers’ needs.

For the one third of workers from the West travelling to workplaces outside of the region, the transport infrastructure and network ensures that they enjoy a 30-minute or quicker commute. Some go to Melbourne’s CBD, where workers have the options of travelling by fast rail, bus or by car along less congested roads to their places of work. For others, Melbourne’s West provides a gateway to opportunities in the thriving regional economies of Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat.

Melbourne’s West has risen to the twin disruptions of its rapid growth and hot and dry climate by transforming into a more circular and greener economy. It has become a magnet for clean industries and created green jobs.

Housing in the West of Melbourne is as diverse as its people with dwellings suited to different life stages, needs, and incomes. Families have a choice of quality childcare providers, reputable public and private schools, and world class education and training, with a dual sector university at its hub. All have superlative access to health, sport and wellness, social and community services that are suited to their age demographic and complexity of need.

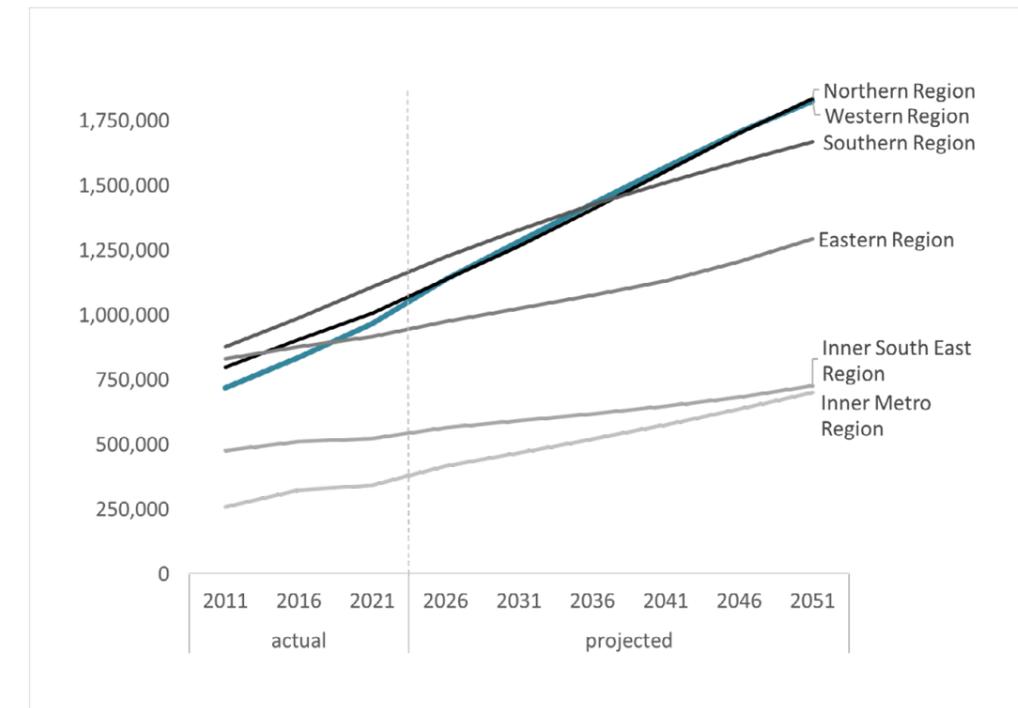
The West of Melbourne is celebrated for its outstanding civic amenities - beautiful public spaces, galleries, sporting precincts, conference and event centres. These places bring people together, foster creativity and well-being, making the region not only a great place to live and work, but also to play and visit.

Drivers

Four Ps are driving the future fortunes of the West of Melbourne — Population, Participation, Productivity and Place.

The region has a large and growing Population. Since the turn of the century, the population of Melbourne’s West has been the fastest growing in Australia¹. Currently it is Greater Melbourne’s third largest region. By the time the next Census comes around it is forecast to be in first place. By the end of the forecast period depicted in Figure 2 its population will have close to have doubled to 1.8 million. To put that into perspective, that is as big as the 2021 Census night count of South Australia’s population. The large outer West LGAs of Wyndham and Melton are projected to keep on growing at a pace.

Figure 2: Actual and projected population in Metropolitan Melbourne



Sources: Actual — ABS Census of Population and Housing; Projected — Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) (2023) Victoria in Future (VIF) population and household projections, second release, December.

The West of Melbourne is one of the most multi-culturally diverse regions in Australia. This is a big asset to be leveraged in relation to economic dynamism and social and cultural richness.

The West of Melbourne has a large working-aged population who want to work, as evidenced by residents’ high rates of labour force Participation. However, not all who want to work can find it. Particularly if they are young.

Productivity - the quantity of goods and services produced per worker — has significant scope for enhancement. There are two big productivity opportunities. The first is the growth in the region’s skilled and highly credentialled young workers. While the average qualification level of the West of Melbourne’s workforce has not yet reached the Greater Melbourne average, it is well on its way. The second is to harness the collective strength of complementary industries thereby attracting private investment and enhancing public infrastructure to support investment.

Place refers to the conditions that make the West of Melbourne a feasible, attractive and sustainable place to live, work, invest, visit and play. The West of Melbourne has much in its favour, notably the availability of affordable greenfield land for development. It is also a gateway to Melbourne’s CBD, Victoria’s large regional economies, other states and, as home to two airports and one seaport, to the rest of the world.

¹ Centre of Policy Studies (CoPS) (2024) WoMEDA Economic Briefing 2024.1, 30 May.

However, the West of Melbourne is also warmer and drier than the other regions in Greater Melbourne. The interplay of this plus the region’s explosive population growth is causing the region to suffer growing pains that, if nothing is done, threaten to cause booming conditions to bust.

Table 1 summarises the strengths and the weaknesses associated with each of the four Ps. Appendix 2 shares an expanded analysis of the points raised within.

Table 1: Strengths and weaknesses of the West of Melbourne’s foundations for growth

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large and growing • proportionally large working aged population • culturally diverse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high youth unemployment
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high employment to population ratio • high rate of labour force participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high youth unemployment • too few local jobs relative to size and growth of the working aged population • increasing numbers commuting to work exacerbating congestion
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • becoming more skilled • pocketed concentrations of high skilled workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skill levels below state average • geographic disparities in skill levels • insufficient coordinated effort by geographically proximate and complementary industries
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • affordable greenfield land available for development • gateway to Melbourne’s CBD, Victoria’s large regional economies and to other states • location of two airports and one seaport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hot, dry climate and low tree canopy coverage • ill-prepared for the pace and scale of growth



Six Pillars

To capitalise on the strengths and overcome the weaknesses, WoMEDA puts forward six-pillars:

- I. City-Building
- II. Transport
- III. Jobs and Skills
- IV. Industry
- V. Liveability
- VI. Economic and Social Inclusion

The rest of this Strategic Foundations Paper is dedicated to covering each in turn.

Pillar I City-Building

Greater Melbourne has a choice. It can remain a monocentric city where the focus of investment is on supporting the concentration of work in its CBD. Alternatively, it can choose to focus its investments on supporting Greater Melbourne to become more polycentric, with multiple, more spatially diverse centres of economic activity.

There are considerable social, economic, and environmental challenges associated with being a monocentric city. Here we touch on three.

The first is densification of the CBD and all the associated environmental and liveability concerns this gives rise to. Melbourne consistently ranks as one of the world’s most liveable cities. Part of its appeal is its ease of getting about, open spaces, access to nature and reputation for sustainability. Densification can put all this at risk. Crowded trams may make for unpleasant journeys. High rise housing and other structures may erode character and create heat islands. Green spaces may be encroached upon.

Second is commuting. The analysis in Appendix 2 finds that the share of the West of Melbourne’s labour force travelling to workplaces in the CBD is large and, if nothing is done, will get larger. The next Section, where we cover the Transport pillar, runs through associated negatives for commuters, the transport infrastructure and services, and the environment.

Third is that monocentric cities can create spatial socio-economic disadvantage. Many communities living further out from the CBD lack access to jobs that make best use of their skills, amenities and services compared to those who can afford to live closer to the city centre².

Here we encourage consideration of initiatives to advance greater polycentricity. Under this City-Building pillar WoMEDA invites further discussion on:

- a continued focus on priority precincts;
- recognising Cobblebank as a priority precinct;
- shaping Wyndham and Melton to become highly functional satellite cities by 2050; and
- planning for Sunshine to become Greater Melbourne’s second CBD by 2050.

Continue to prioritise precincts

At the core of WoMEDA’s inaugural West of Melbourne Economic Development Strategy were three precincts – Footscray, Sunshine and East Werribee. Back then, in 2017, WoMEDA believed that building strong local hubs of employment would benefit the whole region. This continues to be our firm belief.

Each precinct has a hospital and a tertiary education provider as anchor employers. Beyond this, each has distinctive characteristics that set them apart and can be leveraged for positive effect. A sense of this is provided by the upcoming discussions on existing and new opportunities to expedite job growth in the precincts under the Jobs and Skills pillar. Candidate industry clusters that could be formed in each of the precincts are identified under the Industry pillar.

This Strategic Foundations Paper strengthens and builds on the original core by putting forward reforms for further discussion that are designed to create jobs and sustain the growth and liveability of all of Melbourne’s West.

Recognise Cobblebank as a priority precinct

The other way it builds on the core is by suggesting that serious consideration be given a fourth priority precinct at Cobblebank in the large and fast growing LGA of Melton. Established in 2017, Cobblebank is growing at ‘breakneck’ speed. It is already home to the large live initiatives including the Melton Hospital, the Melton TAFE, and the Western BACE. There is a strong case for it now becoming a priority precinct.

Shape Wyndham and Melton into satellite cities

With the huge growth that has occurred in the populations of Wyndham and Melton and their future projected growth, WoMEDA argues that the East Werribee priority precinct and the proposed Cobblebank priority precinct in Melton, should be viewed in the context of Wyndham and Melton becoming highly functional satellite cities of Melbourne by 2050. They need to progress from largely dormitory suburbs to more self-contained cities, as part of greater Melbourne, but with sufficient employment and amenity to enable Melbourne to maintain its status as one of the world’s most liveable cities.

We propose, therefore, that alongside progressing East Werribee and Cobblebank as priority precincts, future city planning, should include an agreed set of principles and criteria about the features of a highly functional satellite city for Melbourne. These help shape the future development of Wyndham and Melton, with support from all three tiers of government.

² Boodle, Spiller and Perera (2023) Making Melbourne more polycentric: an economic case, Insights, SGS Economics and Planning, December.

Plan for Sunshine to become Melbourne's second CBD

Just as Parramatta became Sydney's second CBD, WoMEDA argues that consideration should be given to a plan for Sunshine to become Melbourne's second CBD by 2050.

There are many parallels between the western regions of Australia's two largest metropolises. However, Greater Western Sydney is further into its journey than the West of Melbourne and is reaping the rewards. Box 1 below captures the highlights. Parramatta provides a model for progress through polycentricity. The story of Parramatta has many parallels with what is envisaged for Sunshine. Parramatta is a hub with transport linkages to the rest of Greater Western Sydney. Its struggling community has been revitalised through investment in infrastructure, jobs and culture. Visitor numbers are anticipated to swell, particularly once it opens its new museum. Its health and innovation cluster is anticipated to accelerate jobs for the future.

Sunshine is the only existing precinct in Melbourne that is recognised as a Metropolitan Activity Centre, an Employment and Innovation Precinct, a Priority Precinct and a Transport super hub. Its connectivity to the satellite cities of Melton and Wyndham as well as Melbourne's CBD, are critical elements in the Strategic Foundations Paper.

Sunshine's strategic location at the centre of Melbourne's West, is enhanced by its transport connectivity, which also includes the Sunshine and Albion stations and regional connections to Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.

Investment in the Sunshine Precinct, including the Albion Quarter, will unlock a huge urban renewal opportunity of up to \$8 billion in private economic development, and the potential to create in the order of 30,000 new jobs and attract 43,000 new residents by 2051.

The development of the Sunshine super hub and the ARL make Sunshine the natural hub around which to build Melbourne's second CBD. It is the natural alternative to Melbourne's CBD for such things as head offices of major corporates, for government offices, and for a convention centre.

Box 1 Parramatta in Greater Western Sydney – a model for progress

Greater Western Sydney has a large young, diverse and ambitious population. And it is fast getting larger. It's current population of 2.7 million people is projected to reach 3.2 million over the next decade. Over the next two decades, it is expected to absorb over two thirds of Sydney's entire population growth.

Greater Western Sydney is an economic powerhouse, accounting for one third of Sydney's economic output. It's gross regional product places it as the third largest economy in Australia, behind the Sydney CBD and Melbourne. However, just as for the West of Melbourne, Greater Western Sydney has experienced its share of growing pains. It has higher than average unemployment and lower than average salary levels, as well as high levels of mortgage and rental stress.

These opportunities and challenges are being addressed by significant investment in infrastructure and jobs. The genesis of these efforts dates back to 2017 when the Greater Sydney Commission delivered an ambitious blueprint outlining a 40-year plan to transform Sydney into a three CBD metropolis by 2056, with two thirds of Sydneysiders living within 30 minutes of their jobs and services.

The plan supported Parramatta's emergence as Sydney's second CBD – a centre of new administrative, business services, judicial and educational jobs, with Parramatta Square at its heart and Western Sydney University as its knowledge-producing head.

Today Parramatta is a hive of economic activity and cultural vibrancy. The recently completed Parramatta Square is redefining the cityscape. It has secured two government anchor tenants, and a clutch of high profile businesses looking to strengthen their footholds in Greater Western Sydney. More broadly, over 30 percent of Australia's top 500 companies have offices in Parramatta. As do an increasing number of start-ups.

In addition, a world-class museum, the Powerhouse Parramatta, is under construction. This is a transformational cultural project. Once completed, it will be the largest museum in New South Wales, attracting two million visitors a year.

Stage 1 of a new light rail network that traverses the city is in operation, comprising a two-way track spanning 12 kilometres connecting Westmead to Carlingford via the Parramatta CBD. With State and Federal planning approval, stage 2 is moving ahead. It will connect stage 1 and the Parramatta CBD to the Sydney Olympic Park.

Internationally recognised medical research and health expertise is coalescing at Westmead. A children's hospital, a new university and business enterprises are positioning it to become a premier health and innovation cluster that will accelerate the delivery of jobs for the future.

To capitalise on these gains requires continuous momentum and a collective focus. Governments (local, State and Federal), the public and private sector, and the community are being urged to continue to work together on initiatives that generate jobs and contribute to growth while supporting sustainability.

Elevate the roles Hobsons Bay plays

As well as the development of precincts in Maribyrnong, Brimbank, Wyndham and Melton, Hobsons Bay also has important roles to play in the future vision of the West of Melbourne.

In the discussion under the Industry pillar, the revitalisation of the West of Melbourne's industrial zone is put forward as an important priority. The repurposing of sites that were previously the focus of traditional manufacturing is encouraged. The former Toyota car assembly plant, which now houses the Toyota Centre of Excellence, is an example of the possibilities.

Hobsons Bay also has a significant role to play in the West of Melbourne's visitor economy strategy with its important waterfront assets. WoMEDA recognises that the significant amount of work done over recent years to the piers and jetties³ and to balance the use and heritage values of the maritime precinct. We encourage a continued and elevated focus. A big question in the longer term is whether the BAE site could be incorporated into the maritime precinct⁴. There are significant impediments to this, notably its private freehold status, land contamination and proximity to a major hazard facility at Point Gellibrand.

A further opportunity not far away is to invest in developing Scienceworks, a very successful science museum in Spotswood. It attracts a large number of visitors from within the State, especially school groups and could be a major visitor attraction for interstate and international visitors.



³ Parks Victoria (2023) Williamstown Local Port Area Plan.

⁴ Visit <https://engage.vic.gov.au/williamstown-maritime-precinct>

Pillar II Transport

The analysis of labour force participation shared in Appendix 2 covers not just ‘if’ working-aged residents of Melbourne’s West are working, but also ‘where’ they are working. There we learn that, under business as usual conditions, the current share of 47.9 percent of workers from the West travelling to workplaces outside the region is expected to climb to over half (50.4 percent) of a much expanded workforce by 2034. Most will be going to jobs in Melbourne’s CBD.

The average time to travel to work for workers from the West is significantly higher than for Melbourne as a whole, and it is set to increase. By 2034, total commuting hours in the West is forecast to increase for all LGAs, by an average of 34 percent, but the increases in Wyndham and Melton will be much greater⁵.

This has an obvious negative impact on workers’ quality of life and health. It also comes at a significant opportunity cost. It is time that could alternatively be spent working, with family or on other leisure time activities. Add to this the energy consumption, emissions, associated climate impacts and noise pollution, and the cost is clearly high. One recent study estimates that the annual cost of congestion in Melbourne is expected to double from around \$5 billion to \$10 billion between 2020 and 2030⁶.

The Jobs and Skills pillar coming up next, together with the Industry pillar, is designed to create and grow quality jobs in Melbourne’s West, particularly in the precincts. Easing the strain on over-burdened transport infrastructure and services is a big motivator. But under any plausible scenario contemplated, population growth in the region will continue to place additional pressure on transport infrastructure. While investments are being made, they are not keeping pace with the need.

To realise the vision where commuters from the West of Melbourne can get to their places of work in 30-minutes or less requires more than growing employment opportunities in the precincts. It requires integrated transport infrastructure and services planning that establishes the priorities. It also needs to be cognisant of the interdependencies, and to optimise sequencing.

WoMEDA welcomes the State Government’s investments in the West’s transport infrastructure. We look forward to the opening of the Metro Tunnel and the Westgate Tunnel.

Looking ahead, top priorities for further discussion are to expedite and expand the Western Rail Plan, put in place better bus services, and put the OMR back on the agenda.

Expedite and expand the Western Rail Plan

There is a State Government endorsed Western Rail Plan. The map shared in Figure 3 portrays its elements. Key projects are the: Sunshine station super hub, ARL, electrification of the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines, and the Werribee line extension. We propose that consideration should be given to the western leg of the SRL in the refreshed plan.

Welcome developments earlier this year were the pledges of funding from both levels of Government for the ARL, including the Sunshine super hub. The problem that remains is that the timing of some key elements of the Plan are uncertain.

Sunshine super hub and the ARL

In February, the Prime Minister pledged to invest in the super hub at Sunshine station. A matter of months later, in May, the State Government’s Budget allocated funding to the project. As is evident from Figure 3, the Sunshine super hub is the intersection point of the other transport infrastructure opportunities discussed here. In other words, through the super hub, the LGAs of the West of Melbourne are not only connected to Melbourne Airport and the CBD, they are connected with each other.

Having made a positive start with the super hub, State and Federal policy makers are urged to maintain the momentum. The ARL is needed to support the movements of a projected doubling of passengers over the next two decades. Work has started on the Sunshine super hub and we encourage as much urgency as possible in completing the whole ARL. The ideal would be for completion ahead of the third runway at Melbourne Airport coming on stream, and the Tullamarine reaching capacity.

WoMEDA requests that the State Government works with the Commonwealth Government to fully fund the ARL and that it progresses with urgency towards a full and timely completion.

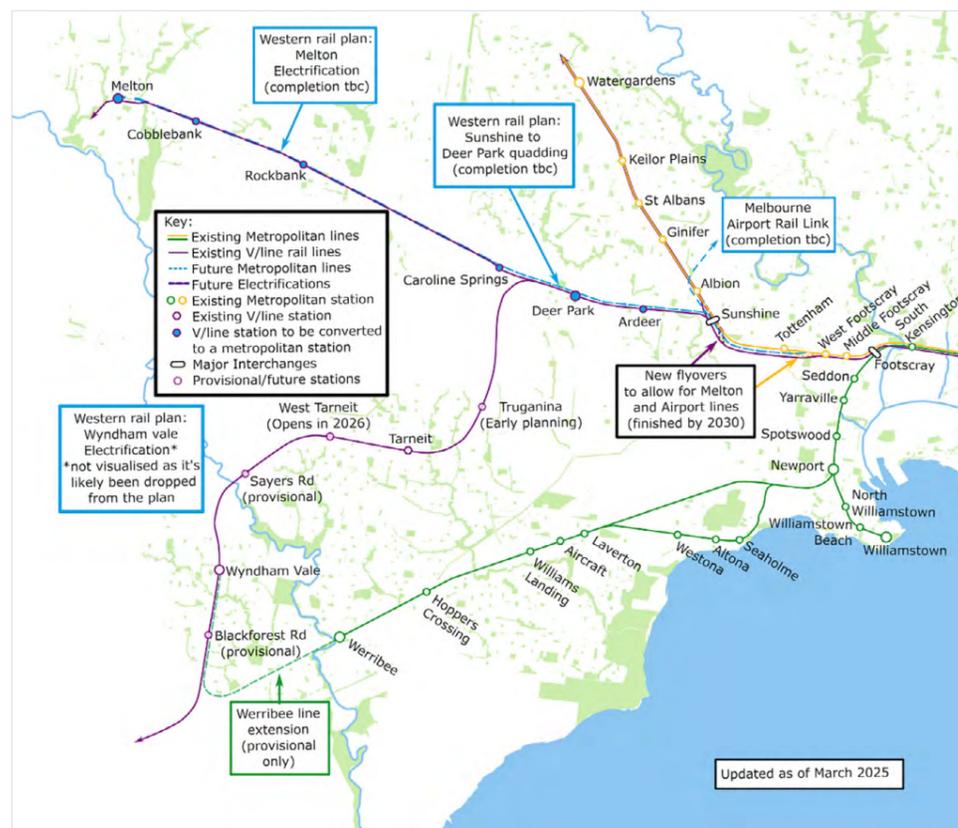
This request reflects a recurring theme of submissions WoMEDA received: the ARL, with Sunshine as a super hub, are essential infrastructure projects that should be prioritised and hastened



⁵ CoPS (2025) WOMEDA Economic Briefing 2025.1.

⁶ Boodle, Spiller and Perera (2023) op cit.

Figure 3: Actual and projected population in Metropolitan Melbourne



Sources: Source: By True Believers - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Electrification of the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines

When the Western Rail Plan was first announced back in 2018, part of the promise was for increased services via the electrification and duplication of the Wyndham Vale and Melton lines. The announcement acknowledged the urgent need created by rapid population growth in the outer West, which was straining capacity and causing congestion on existing V/Line services. The original plan sought to separate V/Line services from the new metro electric services – a critical step in providing improved service frequency to patrons in the outer West as well as to those in the large neighbouring regions of Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat. The timing was for completion by mid-2023.

WoMEDA recognises that progress is being made towards putting in place the prerequisites for electrification. We encourage progress to continue as speedily as possible to enable the completion of this critically important project.

Werribee line extension

An added way to relieve congestion is to extend the Werribee metro line to connect with the Wyndham Vale line. However, the absence of any confirmation that this extension will go ahead leaves the Wyndham LGA with no foreseeable solution to its travel problems, other than forcing commuters into cars and onto already clogged arteries.

Western leg of the SRL

Missing from the map in Figure 3 is the western leg of the SRL, which is to run from Sunshine to Werribee. It complements the ARL and enables those travelling along the leg to easily extend their journeys in all directions via the Sunshine station super hub. WoMEDA requests that the State Government includes the SRL West in a refreshed Western Rail Plan and that planning for SRL West be advanced. This would accelerate job growth between the two precincts and support the projected growth in people travelling to work across and outside the region.

Design better bus services

There is little point in growing jobs in the precincts or providing better rail connections between activity centres and Melbourne’s CBD if people in Melbourne’s West struggle to connect with either. The limited coverage, infrequency, and roundabout routes of current bus services is forcing residents to suffer either protracted commute times or the financial burden of owning and running multiple cars.

Just 1.2 percent travel to work by bus - lower than the 1.4 percent average for Greater Melbourne. In the outer West LGAs of Wyndham and Melton the shares are tiny at 1.0 and 0.7 percent respectively. The 18.3 percent share of West of Melbourne households with three or more vehicles is higher than the Greater Melbourne average of 17.0 percent. It is particularly high in Melton where the comparative share is 23.4 percent. Table 2 captures the comparative statistics.

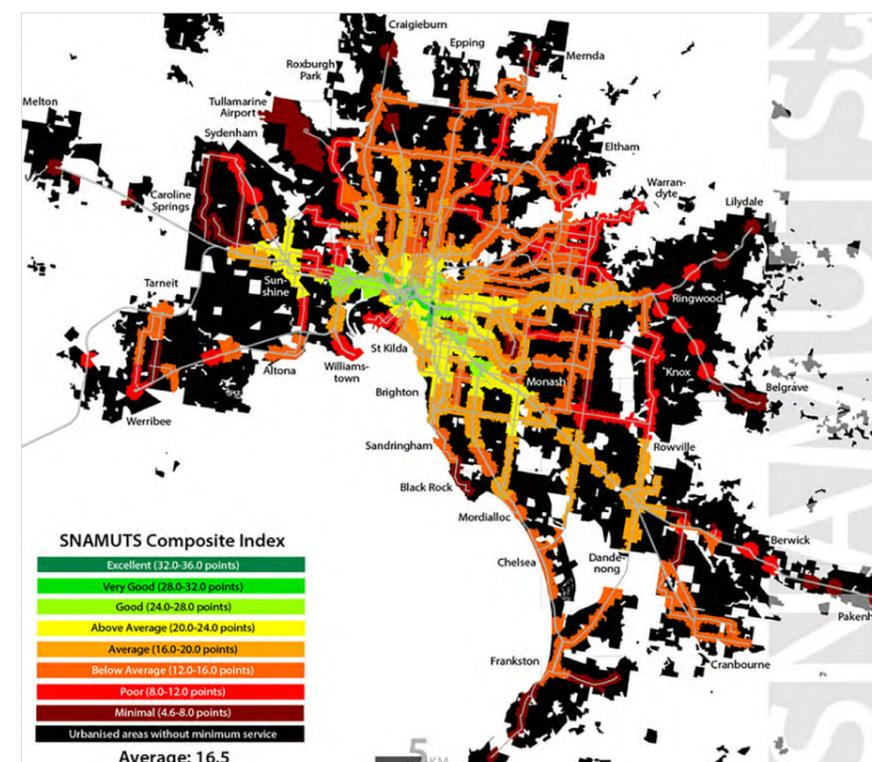
Table 2: Bus usage and car ownership by West of Melbourne residents
Percent

LGA	BUS AS THE MAIN MODE FOR JOURNEY TO WORK*	HOUSEHOLD WITH 3 OR MORE VEHICLES**
Melbourne – West	1.2	18.3
Brimbank	1.2	21.4
Hobsons Bay	1.1	14.0
Maribyrnong	2.7	9.1
Melton	0.7	23.4
Wyndham	1.0	17.6
Greater Melbourne	1.4	17.0

Sources: * Derived using ABS TableBuilder, ** ABS 2021 Census Quickstats.

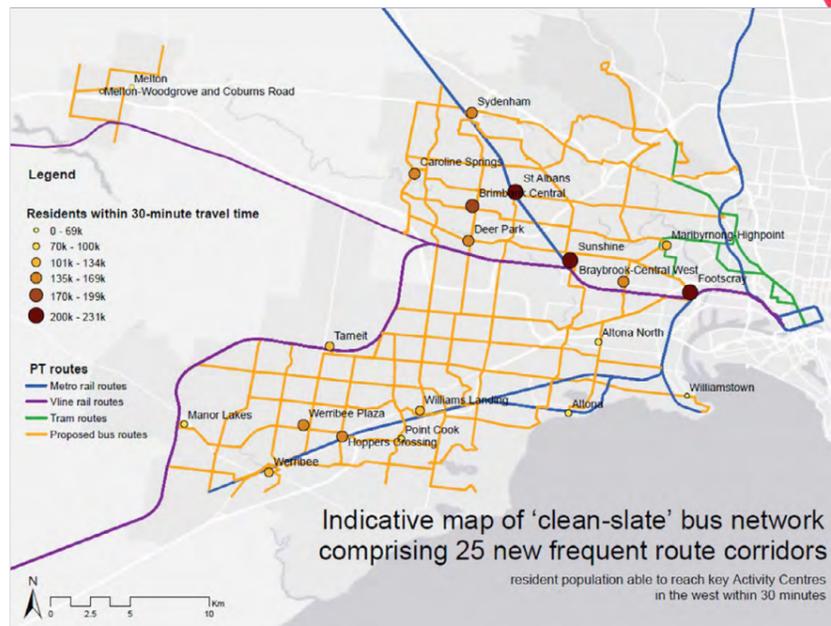
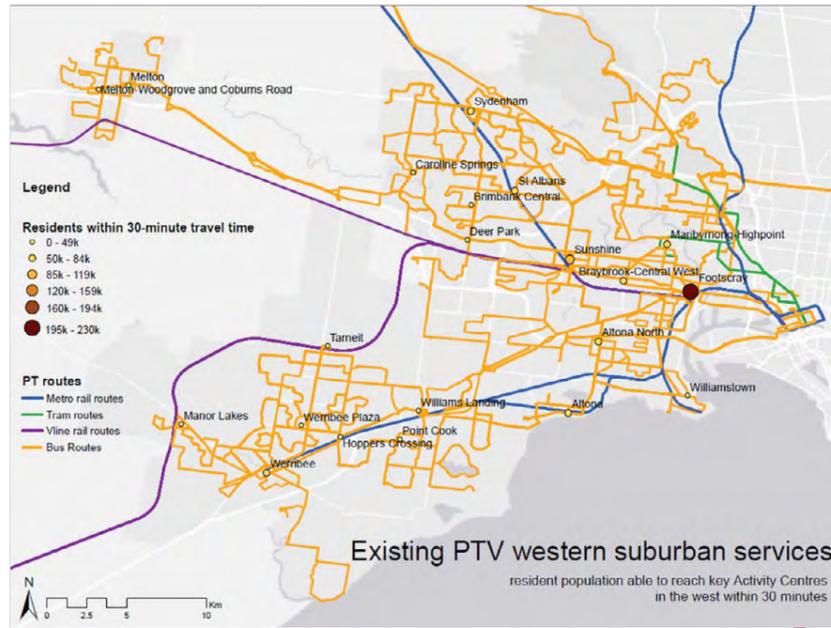
Public transport accessibility in Melbourne’s West is very low. Figure 4 assesses the accessibility of public transport services in Greater Melbourne relative to international standards. Compared to the rest of Melbourne, the West of Melbourne is a public transport ‘desert’.

Figure 4: Public transport in Greater Melbourne
For 2021 based on an international comparative index



Source: Spatial Network Analysis for Multi-modal Urban Transport Systems (SNAMUTS) website.

Figure 5: Existing vs 'clean slate' bus network



Source: Lawrie, I and Stone, J (2022) Better Buses for Melbourne's West, Briefing Paper, June.

The Victorian Government's ambition of a bus stop within 400 metres of all dwellings explains why there are currently 80 different thinly spread services, and why many of these services are operating at low frequencies and for limited hours.

The 'clean slate' alternative for Melbourne's West could provide better services along just 25 interconnected routes. The trade-off would be a slightly longer walk for some to their nearest bus stop. This is compensated by faster, more frequent and connected services over longer hours of operation. 'Faster' is enabled by buses comparable to Melbourne's 'Smartbus' services and with on road priority measures, such as dedicated bus lanes. 'More frequent' means an operating interval of every 10 to 12 minutes throughout much of the day. 'Connected' is enabled by the grid pattern of the network and its links to other public transport services and to activity centres. While there would be some upfront capital costs associated with this proposal, the ongoing increase in operational cost is modest due to the reduction in routes.

A more recent pragmatic proposal under development that integrates current services would require additional funding. But it would be money well spent. Services are envisaged to run every 10 minutes from 7am to 9pm, and every 12 to 15 minutes from 6am to 7am and 9pm to midnight seven days a week. The upfront capital cost is \$200 million. An additional annual operational funding of \$95 million on top of the current spend of \$190 million would be required.

Reform is essential to match population growth and restore equity with the rest of Melbourne. WoMEDA encourages further exploration of the reform opportunities.

Put the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road (OMR) back on the agenda

Under the Jobs and Skills pillar the case is made for expediting the WIFT. A prerequisite for getting greatest value from the WIFT is that it is well connected to the freight network. The OMR is essential for these purposes. The OMR is a 100 kilometre high-speed road transport link for people and freight in Melbourne's North and West. It is vital infrastructure, especially given the expansion of the Port and the projected increase in freight container traffic on trucks.

WoMEDA invites discussion with the Commonwealth and State Governments about putting the OMR back on the agenda and firming up on its timing and funding. This would provide business with the confidence to commit resources to planned investments in the West.





Photograph by Ben Wrigley Photography

Pillar III Jobs and Skills

To grow jobs in the West of Melbourne, WoMEDA encourages discussion on how to expedite the precinct plans and revitalise the industrial zone. We advise a planned approach to ensuring that workers from the West have the skills that match opportunities in their own backyard.

Expedite West of Melbourne Precinct Plans to grow jobs in the region

As we have already covered, within the next decade more than half of the workers from Melbourne’s West will commute daily to workplaces outside the region, most often to Melbourne’s CBD. We also learnt that many of those not prepared or able to make that commute may be settling for roles that do not put their talents to best use.

What if there were more roles suited to the skills of the large and growing workforce within the region? What if there was sufficient job growth within the precincts to allow more to avoid the long and slow commute to the CBD? This would give them back time for work, family or leisure. It would minimise the further densification of Melbourne’s CBD. And it would also ease the congestion faced by those who continue to commute to workplaces outside of the region.

CoPS examined a range of scenarios where an additional 20,000 jobs were differentially spread across the precincts, as shown in the upper section of Table 3. A key conclusion to draw from its analysis is that the ambition for jobs in the precincts needs to be large. That is, while the spread of jobs under each scenario was effective in reducing average commute times relative to business as usual in 2034, under no scenario were they sufficient to bring those times down below current levels.

Table 3 Alternative scenarios for job growth in the precincts

EXTRA JOBS ABOVE BASELINE BY 2034	S1: SUNSHINE FOCUSED	S2: WERRIBEE FOCUSED	S3: ALL PRECINCTS
Footscray (Maribyrnong)	5,000	5,000	5,000
Sunshine (Brimbank)	10,000	10,000	5,000
Werribee (Wyndham)	5,000	10,000	5,000
Melton			5,000
TOTAL	20,000	20,000	20,000
CHANGE IN ESTIMATED COMMUTING TIMES IN 2034			
Average minutes	-0.5	-0.5	-0.5
Total hours ('000)	-3.0	-2.7	-2.9

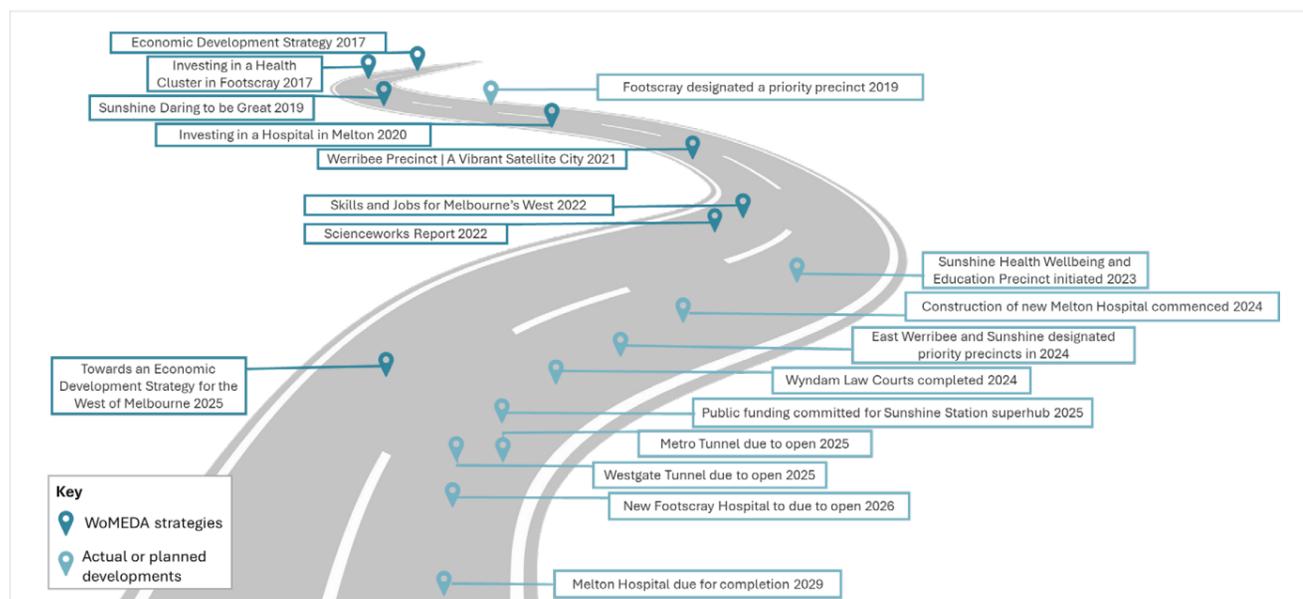
Source: CoPS (2025) WOMEDA Economic Briefing 2025.1.

The ambition is large, but it is not impossible, and we have already started the journey. Figure 6 captures the road travelled since the 2017 Strategy and how it and subsequent precinct-focused strategies will fuel future jobs and growth. In Footscray, its new hospital, due to open its doors early next year, will not merely help meet the health care needs of the West’s growing population, it will create over 250 new local jobs⁷ and become a hub of health and learning. The public funding commitments to the Sunshine Station super hub will see the precinct bustle with activity and civic life, increasing its attractiveness as a place to live, work, visit and invest. In Werribee, staffing the Wyndam Law Courts will provide employment opportunities for local legal, other justice professionals and administrative workers. In Cobblebank, the new Melton Hospital is anticipated to create around 375 new jobs during construction, and some 2250 ongoing roles by 2035⁸.

⁷ Victorian Health Building Authority (2021) New Footscray Hospital Project, Project Summary, May. Note that this projection is in line with what CoPS forecast four years earlier.

⁸ WoMEDA (2020) Investing in a New Hospital in Melton.

Figure 6: Strategies and developments in the West of Melbourne



Each of the precincts will have a hospital and tertiary education provider as anchor employers, which should help to foster skills and innovation in the precincts, as well as be employers in their own right. Over and above this, each will need to develop specific industry capabilities that provide distinctiveness and help to promote industry clusters.

Figure 7 contemplates what next for the precincts. Proposed are new opportunities that sustain the progress being made by live initiatives. All initiatives, live and new, play to the strengths of each precinct and reflect the inputs and insights of some excellent submissions. They include some of the opportunities previously tested in the Consultation Paper, additional opportunities where compelling cases were made for their inclusion, and exclude other opportunities previously floated based on sage advice proffered.

WoMEDA requests that the State Government commits to the ongoing development of priority precinct plans for East Werribee, Footscray and Sunshine, with a central focus on growing the number of local jobs in the region, and an associated focus on enhancing amenities in and around the precincts to make them attractive places to live work and play. In turn, WoMEDA commits to supporting the Government in the development and implementation of these plans.

Footscray

In Footscray, the completion of the new Footscray Hospital, co-located with Victoria University's Footscray Park Campus, will provide major impetus to the precinct and stimulate significant private co-investment.

Investment should also flow from renewed efforts to revitalise the Footscray CBD. With foundational investments progressing, such as that raised immediately above and the Metro Tunnel, Future Footscray has called on the State Government to leverage them as catalysts for private sector confidence and long-term economic return. Future Footscray unites leaders from business, property, the Maribyrnong Council, State and Federal Ministers, VU, Western Health, CoHealth and Footscray Community Arts.

Also supporting this revitalisation is the Council's Creative West project, which this year secured a \$5 million Commonwealth Government contribution. The project is designed to transform the Footscray Library into a vibrant cultural space that will include a 500-seat performance venue: a contemporary library and learning hub, and open spaces.

An exciting opportunity for consideration that would further add to the precinct's cultural infrastructure would be to establish a landmark gallery and cultural hub of international standing. This was floated last year in a masterplan co-authored by the Council and Footscray Community Arts with the support of the State Government. The vision is to redevelop a warehouse into a nationally and internationally renowned major gallery that speaks to the diversity of Melbourne's West, and to provide cultural, creative and commercial tenancies⁹.

In addition to culture, the precinct's other strength is in sports. The Western Bulldogs Football Club's ambition is to continue building the Whitten Oval into an activity hub beyond a training and playing venue for professional sports teams. Its sights are set on community sports, education, the arts, hospitality, health, and supporting business start-ups¹⁰.

⁹ Footscray Community Arts (2025) Submission.

¹⁰ Western Bulldogs Club (2025) Submission.

Figure 7: Strengths and opportunities in the precincts and their surrounding areas





Sunshine

In Sunshine, should either level of government establish a presence there, the experiences of Parramatta covered under the City-Building pillar, suggest that this could provide a powerful catalyst for others to follow, thereby accelerating the precinct's transformation into Melbourne's second CBD. This is a tried and tested strategy that also worked well in Geelong. It is likely that corporate head offices or branch offices would also follow suit.

As the super hub and the ARL come on stream and the precinct transforms, there is an urgent need to ramp up its capacity to cater for the 6-8 million visitors projected to pass through the super hub annually¹¹. Whether travelling for business or leisure, they need to be provided with both the ability and enticements to stay.

The ability for visitors to Sunshine to stay will depend on the adequacy of accommodation and food services and the visitor infrastructure. More than organic growth is necessary to prepare for and take best advantage of what is to come. As argued in the context of a proposed visitor economy industry cluster under the Industry pillar, all relevant parties need to work together to anticipate and meet visitor needs.

The Vietnamese Museum currently under construction, and the proposed Sunshine Energy Park, provide visitors with enticements to stay. A major conference centre would provide a further lure.

The Vietnamese Museum is flagged for completion in the middle of next year. It will be a landmark institution dedicated to preserving and celebrating the rich history and cultural heritage of the Vietnamese community in Australia. Its location in Sunshine makes perfect sense given the precinct's large Vietnamese population.

The Sunshine Energy Park will be a new major multi-use parkland destination located next to the centre of Sunshine and the Albion Station redevelopment. The Federal Government has contributed \$500,000 to develop the business case for the Park.

Establishing a conference centre is worthy of further consideration. It could serve more than a business purpose. It could become a focal point for cultural celebrations. A claim to fame of the Brimbank LGA is that its overseas born population share is the highest in the region.

East Werribee

A new opportunity in East Werribee is the Werribee Skills Accelerator. VU has been working with Government Ministers to realise its vision for the Accelerator through collaboration and co-location with other TAFE providers.

As home to the iconic Werribee Mansion and an Open Range zoo, the Werribee precinct's attractiveness as a place to visit for work or leisure is a feature that can be built upon. Deliberate and concerted effort is required to seek out and explore new opportunities. The precinct would have made a great home to two significant opportunities contemplated in recent years – Disneyland Australia and ABBA Voyage. While the economics did not justify either opportunity going ahead, this is the calibre of attraction that would significantly enhance the precinct's visitor appeal. East Werribee and its surrounding areas' relative abundance of affordable land may help overcome the financial hurdle. So too would ensuring that the precinct is connected by transport links internally and to the rest of the West and the CBD. Priority areas for action to bring this about are covered in the previous Section.

Greater Western Water's (GWW's) East Werribee water recycling facility and water reuse is paramount for sustainable population growth. As discussed in the next Section, it can also be leverage for technology innovations.

Cobblebank

Having been established as recently as 2017, Melton's Cobblebank is growing at 'breakneck' speed. Live initiatives, in addition to the Melton Hospital, are the Melton TAFE, and the Western BACE. The exciting challenge is to maintain and build on the momentum.

The neighbouring Melton City Centre has received Commonwealth funding support for establishing a university Study Hub, which will allow students undertaking tertiary education from any Australian institution to have free access campus-style study spaces and supports. It will be delivered by Djerriwarrh Community & Education Services, in partnership with Melton City Council and VU.

Revitalise the West of Melbourne industrial zone

In the satellite image of the West of Melbourne shared in Figure 8 there is a striking expanse of white on the eastern side. This is the region's vast industrial zone – the largest in Australia. The zone extends from the coastal wetlands of Altona, sweeping across multiple suburbs and reaching as far as Caroline Springs. Its sheer scale underpins the West of Melbourne's role as a major manufacturing, logistics, and distribution hub. Its proximity to transport corridors and residential communities makes it a key driver of economic activity. Importantly, sections of this zone lie close to Sunshine and Footscray suggesting the potential to both benefit from, and to support, the growth in these precincts.

Figure 8: Satellite image of the West of Melbourne



Source: Google Earth.

The character of this industrial landscape, however, is in transition. The zone is a legacy of past manufacturing strengths and a canvas for future development. Through thoughtful planning, investment, and adaptive re-use, the zone can be revitalised, creating jobs and growth.

¹¹ Western Melbourne Tourism (WMT) (2025) Submission.

Repurpose sites

In 2017, Toyota closed the doors on its car assembly plant in Altona, ending more than half a decade of vehicle manufacturing in Greater Melbourne and directly affecting around 2,500 jobs.

In 2022, the ExxonMobil Altona oil refinery ceased its operations. The refinery had been operating since about 1949 and employed several hundred people at closure. Its closure and wider economic pressures contributed to instability for chemical and plastics manufacturers in the area. The ultimate demise of Qenos in the last financial year, which put hundreds more jobs at risk, shows how one large closure ripples through local supply chains.

The West of Melbourne is not the only casualty of deindustrialisation. This is a worldwide phenomenon. Nevertheless, its sheer scale of impact warrants particular attention. Not for the purposes of halting structural change, but for the purpose of shaping it for positive effect.

Vacant sites present an opportunity for ambitious industrial and commercial revitalisation, such as through advanced manufacturing, clean energy, or mixed-use employment. Their transformation could serve as a catalyst for broader renewal across the West of Melbourne industrial zone.

The former Toyota car assembly plant provides an example of what is possible. It is now home to the Toyota Centre of Excellence, which includes a hydrogen production and refuelling facility, a state of the art Product Centre for local vehicle engineering, and a large-scale pre-delivery inspection and service parts facility.

Likewise, the Qenos site has been sold to an international consortium with plans to develop the site into an intermodal freight and logistics hub, creating thousands of jobs locally.

As mentioned in the discussion on elevating the roles Hobsons Bay plays there is an interesting question of whether the BAE site could be successfully repurposed.

Expedite the WIFT

The proposed establishment of the WIFT in Melton is set to further extend and strengthen this industrial zone. The WIFT would provide a modern, large-scale logistics hub directly linked to national freight networks, easing pressure on the Port of Melbourne and boosting the West's position as a gateway for goods movement across Victoria and interstate.

Deferral of the WIFT is undermining this and impacting more broadly. It has meant that freight has to travel an additional 25 kilometres from Beveridge to reach customers in the West, particularly those in Laverton and Truganina. The Victorian Transport Association has calculated that this adds between 400 and 800 extra trucks on the M80 freeway daily, increasing congestion and creating safety concerns.

WoMEDA invites discussion especially with the Commonwealth Government but also with the State Government on how to expedite plans for the WIFT and related transport infrastructure.

Develop a Jobs and Skills Plan to better match the labour force with jobs

A point repeatedly made is that the West of Melbourne has a large available workforce, many of whom have to travel outside the region to work. That should in itself represent an incentive for businesses to locate in the region as, in general, workers prefer to work closer to home to avoid unnecessary commuting times.

In a 2022 study by VU, in collaboration with WoMEDA¹², four priorities were identified to better match the current and future labour force with the available jobs to: create a local skill ecosystem, facilitate a culture of innovation, enhance authentic engagement and build capacity for educational institutions to be the hub of industry collaboration.

These remain robust proposals for further consideration. The policy environment is showing increasing signs of being conducive to this approach, with investment in skills to grow productivity being a priority that emerged from the recent Commonwealth Treasurer's Economic Reform Roundtable. This approach of promoting strategic collaboration between VET, higher education and industry, or 'Tertiary Harmonisation', is a priority of the new Australian Tertiary Education Commission.

WoMEDA invites the State Government to collaborate on the development a Jobs and Skills Plan for the West of Melbourne, to identify how the education and training system, in partnership with industry, can ensure that the West of Melbourne's growing workforce has the knowledge, skills and capabilities to meet the needs of industry and help grow productivity and labour force participation.

The following elaborates on the four priorities that could scaffold the Plan.

Create a local skill ecosystem

West of Melbourne's residents and businesses would benefit from the creation of a local skills ecosystem where skill formation occurs in place-based settings with employers, through enhanced relationships between industry, education providers and individuals. This approach recognises the importance of the contexts where skills are used and that there are a range of parties who affect and are affected by skill formation. The objective would be to facilitate the development of skills, competencies and attributes useful both immediately and which will assign long-term value to individuals, industry and the region.

An effective ecosystem requires co-ordination and collaboration to overcome perverse incentives for employers to poach from their competitors. The win for employers is confidence in the sufficiency, quality of relevancy of the skills of workers in Melbourne's West. The win for individuals is that the ecosystem supports them working in roles over their working lives that not only make best use of, but hones and expands, their skills.

Facilitate a culture of innovation

There are several innovation possibilities for employers and education providers to collaborate in redesigning jobs, course content, and how training is delivered. Regarding the first, the opportunity is to transform how employers specify their skill needs. The second includes stretching skill development to higher order skills and instilling advanced technical or cognitive skills. The third hints at the scope to use technological innovations to enhance engagement in training, such as the opportunity to learn online or participate in simulated work placements.

Enhance authentic engagement

Authentic engagement between education providers and industry ensures that students are instilled with the skills and capabilities that employers need. The aspiration is that the West of Melbourne operates as a vibrant node of Greater Melbourne where industry knows it can find deep wells of talent. The geographic proximity, diverse talent pool and closeness to major infrastructure in the West means that authentic industry engagement is entirely possible.

Efforts to advance this aspiration must be continuous, and not a single event. At a minimum, education and training providers need to ensure industry have clear means and mechanisms for engaging in discussions about course provision and skill needs. Deep relationships can be achieved through secondments, colocation and collaboration on learning content.

Build capacity for educational institutions to be the hub of industry collaboration

Education and training providers are critical in facilitating a cultural shift in the West of Melbourne towards a functioning, thriving skill ecosystem where businesses have confidence they can find and develop skilled workers.

VU, with its dual sector capabilities, is uniquely positioned to harness its deep and sprawling links into the West of Melbourne's businesses and communities to become a hub for collaboration. It can provide a neutral place for collaboration between businesses and enterprises, where the focus is on the shared goal of improving skills within an entire industry. It can provide initial and continuing training through robust partnerships.

¹² Mitchell Institute (2022) Strategies for Skills and Jobs in Melbourne's West, August.

Pillar IV Industry

Three ways to fuel industry and jobs growth in the West of Melbourne are to promote industry clusters, leverage the region's multiculturalism, and develop and implement an investment attraction strategy.

Promote industry clusters

The opportunities to create jobs within the precincts discussed in the previous Section just scrape the surface of possibilities. The even bigger opportunity is to couch them in broader industry cluster policies linked to the precincts in tandem with the Jobs and Skills pillar.

Place-based industry cluster policies sit at the intersection of place-based policies and industrial policies. With its twin foci on jobs and growth, this Strategic Foundations Paper is emblematic of a place-based policy. Industrial policies typically focus on competitiveness within targeted industries. Modern industrial policies now actively shape markets rather than passively corrects failures¹³. Place-based industry cluster policies mobilise place-specific assets to drive economic renewal. They are both targeted – focusing on key industries within a cluster – and transformational – reshaping local economies along new development paths.

Shared in Appendix 2 is the example of the Sunshine Health, Wellbeing and Education Precinct (SHWEP) which, due to the synergies enabled by the colocation of health, wellbeing and education services, is proving to be transformational. As commented there, this is the exception rather than the norm. The norm is insufficient coordinated effort to either locate complementary industry players in proximate distance to each other, access latent capacity, create new capacity, and/or address constraints.

In identifying potential new clusters linked to one or more of the precincts, we have looked for the presence of these deficiencies and the opportunities to do something about them. Table 4 highlights some candidate foci for industry cluster policies in the precincts. The discussion that follows explains the early thinking behind their selection. More detailed analysis is necessary to confirm the status of each.

Table 4 Candidate foci of industry cluster policies in the precincts and their surrounding areas

PRECINCT CLUSTER	MUCH OF MELBOURNE'S WEST	FOOTSCRAY	SUNSHINE	EAST WERRIBEE	COBBLEBANK
Health, education and R & D		✓	✓	✓	✓
Business services		✓	✓		
Advanced manufacturing		✓	✓	✓	
Food manufacturing and agribusiness			✓	✓	✓
Data centres, IT and electrotechnology	✓			✓	
Circular economy	✓				
Transport and logistics	✓				
Creative industries		✓			
Visitor economy		✓	✓	✓	

¹³ OECD (2025) Place-based industrial policy - Lessons for place transformation, Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers Series.

Health, education and R and D

We have already touched on the positive example of the SHWEP in Sunshine. Appendix 2 contains a more extended discussion. Werribee provides exemplars of clustered wrap around health services for population cohorts, such as the Women's Health Hub.

The new Footscray Hospital is an emerging cluster. The hospital will be physically linked to VU by a public footbridge across Ballarat Road. There will be a dedicated research and education space at VU, fostering opportunities for collaboration on research, education and training initiatives. Likewise, the greenfield investment in a hospital in Melton's Cobblebank presents an unprecedented opportunity to deliver a vibrant community asset that will also be a catalyst for development of the surrounding area including public and private sector investment within this precinct's new Metropolitan Activity Centre¹⁴.

Business services

A remarkable learning from Appendix 2 is that the number of workers in Melbourne's West who are professionals has almost doubled since the last Strategy. Concentrations are particularly high in the Footscray precinct. More than two out of every five hold a Bachelors Degree or higher - well above the State average¹⁵. While there is a large and growing number of Business Services located in the precinct¹⁶, the analysis by CoPS finds that an overwhelming majority of professionally skilled workers continue to commute outside the precinct for work.

Currently Sunshine's workforce is not as well qualified as Footscray's. But that can quickly change as it transforms into Melbourne's second CBD. The case study of Parramatta in Box 1 is suggestive of the possibilities. The Parramatta experience demonstrated that attracting and encouraging high profile large employers to establish primary or secondary offices proved catalytic to inspiring the same by others.

Advanced manufacturing

Historically the West of Melbourne was synonymous with traditional manufacturing. Pockets of the West were hit hard by its decline. Place-based industrial cluster policies hold particular promise for revitalising regions hit hard by deindustrialisation¹⁷. Advanced manufacturing could be a source of this revitalisation by putting latent labour capacity back to work, through market shaping initiatives under an industry cluster strategy.

Food manufacturing and agribusiness

The future is particularly bright for advanced food manufacturing in Werribee. Often called 'Melbourne's food bowl'. It is a major agricultural area known for its fertile soils and diverse vegetable and fruit production. The precinct is also home to the CSIRO's Food Innovation Centre - the most extensive food innovation provider to industry in Australia. Food, ingredient and equipment manufacturing companies are able to partner with the Centre and access its expertise, technologies and support in innovation.

Data centres, IT and electrotechnology

In his National Press Club address, Atlassian co-founder and visionary outlined a bold vision where Australia "export[s] megawatts as megabytes for potentially megabucks."¹⁸ What he was referring to is the opportunity to house data centres, not just for Australia, but for Southeast Asia and potentially beyond.

Prerequisite conditions for data centres are an abundance of land, water, power, and people with the right technical skills. The West of Melbourne scores well against each. There is an abundance of affordable land in the outer West and in its industrial zone. Colocation with GWW's East Werribee water recycling facility could solve the water problem¹⁹. Likewise, capitalising on VU's expertise in green energy could help save the energy problem. The Western Skills Accelerator could help develop the technical trade skills required for the construction and ongoing operations of the centres.

¹⁴ Victorian Health Building Authority (2025) New Melton Hospital Project Summary, February.

¹⁵ Based on the 2021 Census.

¹⁶ Over the period 2017 and 2024 the number of Professional, Scientific and Technical Services businesses in the SA2 areas of Footscray and West Footscray – Tottenham grew by 119 to reach a total of 478. This industry sector second placed after Transport, Postal and Warehousing when ranked by business count. Refer ABS Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits for 2024 and 2017.

¹⁷ OECD op cit.

¹⁸ Farquhar, S (2025) National Press Club Address, Season 17, Episode 26.

¹⁹ GWW (2025) Submission.

Circular economy

The State's Economic Growth Statement identifies Victoria's circular economy as one of five priority sectors²⁰. Melbourne West's twin pressures of a hot and dry climate and burgeoning population growth are strong motivators to become a cleaner and more circular economy. On at least a couple of fronts there are grounds for claiming that the West of Melbourne is already leading the way.

Altona North in Hobsons Bay is home to the largest plastics recycling plant in Victoria. The plant is a cross-industry initiative between the Pact Group, Cleanaway, Asahi Beverages and Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, and was established with the support of State Government funding²¹. It is capable of processing the equivalent of around one billion plastic bottles a year, collected from container deposit schemes and kerbside recycling. The bottles are converted to more than 20,000 tonnes of recycled bottles and food packaging. The plant provides a model example of private-public collaboration supporting enterprise, jobs and sustainability that others would be wise to follow.

For water, a more circular and greener economy has meant looking beyond catchment dams for supply and finding uses for waste by-products. In its submission, GWW shares that it has established 11 recycled water schemes, reclaims biosolids from its sewage process for landscaping and garden products, and is using biogas and solar generation to power its Melton treatment plant and feedback into the grid²².

To remain at the cutting edge, counter population and climatic pressures, and realise the environmental and economic benefits of a cleaner and more circular economy requires:

- public-private collaboration and holistic planning to identify and invest in future opportunities;
- the co-location of symbiotic enterprises and other bodies, such the suggestion above to co-locate data centres next to water recycling facilities;
- advantage is taken of the significant national funding available for energy transition²³; and
- education and awareness campaigns that variously promote the opportunities, the potential to be both profitable and sustainable, and the safety and reliability of recycled and reused products.

Transport and logistics

As home to Melbourne's major seaport and two airports, and as a gateway to the CBD, major regions and other States, it is unsurprising that transport and logistics is already well established in Melbourne's West. The transport infrastructure investments discussed in the context of the Transport pillar will enhance the prospects of this cluster to get even bigger. The development of the WIFT planned for Melton will be a further catalyst for expansion. A coordinated approach that includes expediting the development of the WIFT, as urged under the Jobs and Skills pillar, is necessary for maximising the cluster's prospects.

Creative industries

There is enormous potential for the West of Melbourne's creative industries to act as a catalyst for economic growth, attracting visitors, and generating sustainable local employment. The region is already building a reputation as a centre for cultural expression and innovation, with a vibrant mix of creative attractions and activities, particularly concentrated in Footscray. From live music venues, street art and multicultural food festivals to theatre, design and film-making, these activities both reflect the West's diversity and give it a distinctive cultural identity within Melbourne's broader arts scene.

Looking ahead, there are significant opportunities to scale up and integrate these activities into the region's economic and social fabric. Several new initiatives are already in the pipeline. Creative West and the gallery and cultural hub proposed for Footscray under the Jobs and Skills pillar maintains the momentum.



Visitor economy

There is a golden opportunity to grow the visitor economy of Melbourne's West for local value capture and, with it, jobs. Werribee, for example, has much to entice people to visit and stay. A further major attraction, as is proposed in the context of the Jobs and Skills pillar, would provide added enticement. The investments proposed under the Transport pillar are necessary but not sufficient for realising the cluster's potential.

The ability for visitors to stay will depend on the adequacy of accommodation and food services and visitor infrastructure. Growth of the West of Melbourne's accommodation and food sector was stifled by pandemic restrictions. The sector has only recently surpassed the numbers that were employed pre-pandemic. While numbers are expected to continue expanding on the back of the region's large and growing population, more than organic growth is necessary to prepare for and take best advantage of what is to come. All relevant parties (state government departments and bodies, local councils, transport and private business interests) need to work together to anticipate and meet visitor needs.

Marketing, promotion, planning and investment are all necessary to entice visitors to stay. With regards to the first, Western Melbourne Tourism's (WMT's) destination brand, 'Westside', communicates a distinct tapestry of experience through food and drink, arts and performance, industrial heritage and rich multicultural character.

The State Government is encouraged to provide equitable tourism funding and marketing support to initiatives targeting West of Melbourne destinations.

²⁰ Department of Treasury and Finance (2024) Economic Growth Statement Victoria: Open for Business.

²¹ Pact Group (2022) "New Recycling Plant To Be Built In Melbourne's West", 18 January (<https://pactgroup.com/news/game-changing-recycling-plant-to-be-built-in-melbournes-west/>).

²² GWW (2025) op cit.

²³ The \$22.7 billion Future Made in Australia and \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund creates strong opportunities for businesses in Melbourne's West to become part of national renewable energy supply chains.



Leverage multiculturalism and associated entrepreneurship

With one out of three small business owners (34 percent) born outside of Australia²⁴, the West of Melbourne is fortunate to have a large share of migrants. It is more ethnically diverse than Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia. One needs only to walk along the streets of the precincts to experience the associated entrepreneurship and economic dynamism of their multicultural inhabitants. To breathe in the pleasurable mix of exotic aromas wafting from their restaurants and cafes, to discover unique and interesting products, and to witness the innovative business practices, are just some of the region's delights. Migrant enterprises have an outsized impact on their communities. An impressive 25 percent actively invest in training programs and have a high rate of migrant employment²⁵.

The West of Melbourne's multiculturalism is an asset that should be celebrated and leveraged.

Develop and implement an investment attraction strategy

Greater private sector investment in the West of Melbourne will occur when information gaps and misconceptions are addressed, the problem of landbanking is overcome, and when governments prioritise the region for public sector infrastructure.

Address information gaps and misconceptions

There is much on the positive side of the ledger back in Table 1, which lists the strengths and weaknesses shaping the West of Melbourne's prospects. Appendix 2 expands on each. However, a key message, which came up time and time again throughout the consultation process, is that little of this is well known. Worse still, Melbourne's West continues to suffer from the perception that it is less prestigious than the Melbourne CBD. More needs to be done to address the information gaps, counter prevailing negative stereotypes and build the identity of the West as a place to work, study, live, play and, importantly, invest.

On the last point, WoMEDA will continue to play its part. We commit to collaborating with Invest Victoria in attracting private sector investment into Melbourne's West through:

- a West of Melbourne Investment Attraction Roundtable; and
- the development of an Investment Attraction Strategy and Prospectus, with a focus on key strategic industries which, amongst others, include the Victorian Government priority sectors of advanced manufacturing, circular economy, digital technologies, and food and agribusiness.

The purpose of both will be to address the information gaps, and identify the opportunities. They will be targeted to high profile businesses with a potential interest in establishing primary or secondary operations in the West. As the case study of Parramatta demonstrates (refer Box 1), it only takes a few to stimulate the interests of many.

Overcome landbanking

A further barrier that was raised more than a few times by those who engaged with WoMEDA's consultation processes is landbanking. That is, the practice of buying land, holding on to it, and making no specific plans for its use. This has been driven sometimes by anticompetitive behaviours, sometimes by profit. It is preventing the release and use of land for residential, commercial and agricultural purposes. Examples shared in the submissions include Footscray where large commercial sites have remained underdeveloped due to landbanking²⁶. Also the practice of purchasing agricultural land in Werribee as a speculative investment drives up land prices beyond what is justified by agricultural productivity²⁷. Further research is required to determine the extent of landbanking and whether a carrot or a stick, such as a tax, is the best way to overcome it.

Prioritise the West for public sector infrastructure

Lack of information, misconceptions and landbanking are big barriers holding back private sector effort. But they are not the only barriers. Other barriers centre around the sufficiency of public infrastructure, the adequacy of education and training to develop current and future workers, and whether the health and childcare needs of workers and their families can be met within the region. In addition, the lack of diversity and availability of housing, and liveability remain concerns. Each are addressed under separate pillars in this six-pillared Strategic Foundations Paper. With respect to the first, however, only the adequacy of the public sector transport infrastructure is covered.

Other public infrastructure, like water, gas and electricity are similarly crucial to enable the West of Melbourne to grow. We recognise that the delivery of the large scale public infrastructure required to unlock private investment is often costly and complex, but necessary. A strategic approach is required that encompasses co-ordination and collaboration across public and private delivery partners.

²⁴ Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (2023) Small Business Matters, June.

²⁵ Business Victoria (2024) Embracing Diversity: Exploring Victoria's Multicultural Business Hubs, March.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Fresh Select (2025) Submission

Pillar V Liveability

Two of the West of Melbourne's claims to fame are that rapid growth means that it is destined to become Greater Melbourne's most populated region by the next Census, and that it is warmer and drier than the other regions in the area. Both risk undermining liveability within the region unless deliberate and proactive action is taken. Priority foci for further discussion are to:

- continue to be guided by the fundamental principle of Caring for Country in all we do;
- plan regionally, involving all levels of government, to work together for sufficient and diverse housing stock and essential services tailored to the unique needs of the region;
- support and build upon the many great initiatives already in play to increase the tree canopy, conserve water and otherwise promote the sustainability of the environment in Melbourne's West;
- provide greater amenities for sport, as existing amenities may be fewer in number, more distant, or of a lower standard than elsewhere;
- enable lifelong learning through the provision of world class school and higher education and training; and
- plan regionally for better and more sufficient childcare and health services, irrespective of postcode.

Caring for Country

Throughout Melbourne's West, our Councils and anchor institutions all have a significant commitment to the First Nations theme of Caring for Country. They work closely with First Nations leaders to advance it. It is a fundamental principle that WoMEDA is also committed to.

Live examples of it include the Footscray Community Arts Centre, which has one of the leading First-Nations curated arts and performance programs anywhere in Victoria, and the new Wyndham Law Courts feature a uniquely respectful and distinctively designed Koori Courtroom and Yarning Circle - the first of its kind in the nation. The Aboriginal History Archive, and its digitised Gary Foley Collection at VU's Footscray Park Campus, is one of Australia's most significant research and public museum collections of First Nations pride and community control - celebrating key Indigenous movement from the 1960s to the present.

As WoMEDA pursues its Western Growth Dialogue, this will continue to be an important underpinning principle.

Plan regionally for sufficient and diverse housing stock and essential services

More houses are needed to accommodate the West of Melbourne's expanding population. Roughly 153,000 more houses are needed between 2021 and 2036. That is over 10,000 a year. Almost 8,000 of that number are needed to cater for the rapidly growing populations of Melton — Bacchus Marsh and Wyndham.

Table 5 Projected occupied private dwellings in Melbourne's West

	2021	2036	CHANGE OVER 15 YEARS	ANNUAL AVERAGE
Brimbank	65,189	74,705	9,516	634
Hobsons Bay	35,161	42,478	7,317	488
Maribyrnong	36,486	53,815	17,329	1,155
Melton - Bacchus Marsh	66,183	126,681	60,498	4,033
Wyndham	97,883	156,176	58,292	3,886
West of Melbourne	300,902	453,855	152,954	10,197

Source: DTP (2023) VIF population and household projections, second release, December.

Traditionally, one of the attractions of the outer West has been its affordability, particularly to young families. While this remains generally true, the sudden population explosions in some suburbs have had the effect of driving up prices²⁸.

The West has low stocks of not merely affordable houses but insufficient social housing. As some communities gentrify, there are growing pockets of disadvantage and homelessness. The Brimbank municipality has the highest incidence of homelessness in Greater Melbourne, with over 3,800 residents without housing, who are rough sleeping or couch surfing²⁹. Research conducted by the Community Housing Industry Association in conjunction with the UNSW City Futures Research Centre, finds that Melbourne's West has the lowest proportion of social housing in the country³⁰.

The same barriers that plague the rest of the nation impact housing availability in Melbourne's West, including high construction costs, labour shortages, stamp duties taxes, and planning constraints including zoning. Other barriers that are particular to the West of Melbourne include:

- landbanking. The Industry pillar identifies landbanking as a barrier to private business investment. The same behaviours discussed there are also preventing the release and rezoning of land for residential purposes.
- the large number of permits issued through Planning Schemes that lapse on the back of uncertainties regarding the timing and delivery of promised catalytic developments, such as the ARL. For example, over the past five years within the Sunshine Metropolitan Activity Centre, active permits had the potential to deliver 972 new apartments, yet 564 did not progress as permits lapsed³¹.
- the cost of remediating contaminated land that could then accommodate significant housing development. For example, the Maribyrnong Defence site continues to lie vacant. If an agreement can be reached to remediate this site it could potentially unlock over 120 hectares of land in the inner West³².
- lack of essential services, like water, gas and electricity are crucial to accommodate growth in the West of Melbourne's newer suburbs. The Industry pillar identified the same as a barrier to private business investment.

WoMEDA acknowledges the advice of some submissions³³ that there are initiatives already in play to diversify and grow the housing stock. Of note, Victoria's social and affordable housing program — the Big Housing Build — aims to deliver social housing statewide, including in Melbourne's West³⁴. We are also aware that the State Government's goal to build 2.24 million new homes by 2050 under Victoria's Housing Statement 2023 is being operationalised by setting housing targets across all local governments, including those in the West³⁵.

There are questions arising regarding the adequacy of the ambition relative to the needs of the West. There is also concern around the ability of councils to deliver on the demands being made of them. Particularly given the barriers just discussed.

One way through these tensions would be for all levels of government to work together to develop a housing strategy tailored to the unique needs of Melbourne's West and coordinate housing approvals.

This proposal:

- would help achieve better outcomes because it could address differences across the West of Melbourne to deliver targeted outcomes;
- has the potential to accelerate the delivery of housing if it streamlines planning processes and reduces red tape;
- could be scoped to encompass essential services; and
- should be developed in a manner that respects the role of local government as a fundamental partner.

²⁸ The Consultation Paper shared case studies on the median house prices in two suburbs, Tarnet and Aintree, which are respectively in Wyndham and Melton. The age old settlement of Tarnet has become a magnet for young families looking to build their first homes. There, high demand saw median house prices jump by \$100,000 between 2019 and 2024. The relatively new suburb of Aintree has grown at a rate of knots driven by the promise of public investment in key infrastructure and transport services and what was previously affordable housing. Over 2019 to 2024 its median house prices increased at an annual average rate of close to six percent.

²⁹ Ireland, A and Whelan, P (2023) "Melbourne's Western Suburbs one of Australia's Homeless Hotspots," The Westsider, 15 November.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Brimbank City Council (2025) Submission.

³² Maribyrnong City Council (2025) Submission.

³³ DTP (2025a) Submission.

³⁴ Visit <https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/big-housing-build>

³⁵ Visit <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-housing-statement-0>



Promote the sustainability of the environment

A sage warning sounded in Appendix 2 is that the West of Melbourne's dual challenges of climate and population means that it is environmentally vulnerable. Climatic conditions that are hotter and drier than elsewhere in Greater Melbourne means less water, more energy usage, and more emissions. While more people means more demand for water, more energy usage, more emissions, more sewerage, and more waste. There is a clear need to do more to promote the sustainability of the environment in the West. The following covers three areas for action.

The first has already been raised under the Industry pillar. That is to facilitate more private and public sector initiatives to become a cleaner and more circular economy where there is zero waste and net zero emissions.

The second is to be strategic about where growth is encouraged to occur. One submission warned against relaxing planning regulations and policies that are aimed at preserving agricultural land use, environmental values and the open space character of key localities, such as the Werribee South Green Wedge³⁶. Another shared that when asked in connection with the development of the State Government's Plan for Victoria 'what makes thriving and liveable suburbs and towns?' a frequently expressed desire of respondents was for more open spaces³⁷. The Brimbank suburb of St Albans, for instance, offers exciting opportunities to expand green spaces and protect biodiversity.

As already noted in the context of the data centres, IT and electrotechnology industry cluster proposed under the Industry pillar, yet another submission encouraged co-locating the cluster near the West's recycled water network as this would significantly reduce set up costs and conserve precious drinking water³⁸.

The third area for action is to support interested parties working together to further environmental sustainability. This includes and extends beyond initiatives to increase the region's tree canopy. Hot and dry conditions in Melbourne's West are in part due to its low tree canopy: coverage of just 5.5 percent starkly contrasting with the 25.9 percent cover enjoyed in Melbourne's East³⁹. The simple act of growing more trees would provide more shade and bring temperatures down. In addition, trees transform and beautify landscapes, are carbon sinks and, through their root systems, prevent land becoming compacted.

The good news on this front is there is already a solid basis for shared action. WoMEDA notes and supports the ambition of Action 12 of the State Government's Plan for Victoria to achieve 30 percent tree canopy coverage in all urban areas by 2050⁴⁰. Through the submissions, we learnt of the many programs designed to increase tree canopy cover and open space across Melbourne's West, including Greening the West, Greening the Pipeline, the Woody Meadow Project, the Hobsons Bay Wetland Centre, the Chain of Ponds, the State Government's Trees for a Cooler Greener West initiative, and GWW's new Stormwater Harvesting Partnership Program which provides an alternative water source for open space irrigation⁴¹.

More broadly, submissions received communicated the great work being undertaken by participants in the Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action (WAGA). Through WAGA, seven councils⁴² work collaboratively to respond to climate change across the region and encourage their communities – residents and businesses – to make a transition to a low carbon society. WAGA's plans and projects are directed towards both the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

These and other initiatives provide a solid basis that warrants continued support and can be built upon. Potential areas for further exploration and action, raised by those WoMEDA consulted, include research, education and awareness, planning controls, green roofs and requirements for developers to plant out streetscapes.

Provide greater amenities for sport⁴³

The benefits of community sport are many and extend into all facets of life, making people happier, healthier, more productive and socially connected and, by extension, the economy stronger. Yet participation in sports in the West of Melbourne is low relative to other regions in Metropolitan Melbourne. Particularly in Brimbank and in the outer West LGAs.

A big reason why there is low participation rates is that there is insufficient sporting infrastructure. This is particularly, but not exclusively, so in the outer West LGAs as investment has lagged population growth. Further, accessibility to good quality sports grounds, courts, lighting, change rooms, and the like is often lower. Facilities may be fewer in number, more distant, or of a lower standard.

WoMEDA calls on all levels of government to work together to deliver sustained and well planned development of sporting infrastructure across the entire region. We also call on West of Melbourne sporting associations to work as one for these and other purposes. While investment has improved in recent years, a significant gap remains to bring the West's infrastructure up to standard.

Other factors that explain low rates of sport participation in the West of Melbourne are limited public transport options, socio-economic constraints, cultural considerations, and lack of access to elite sport events.

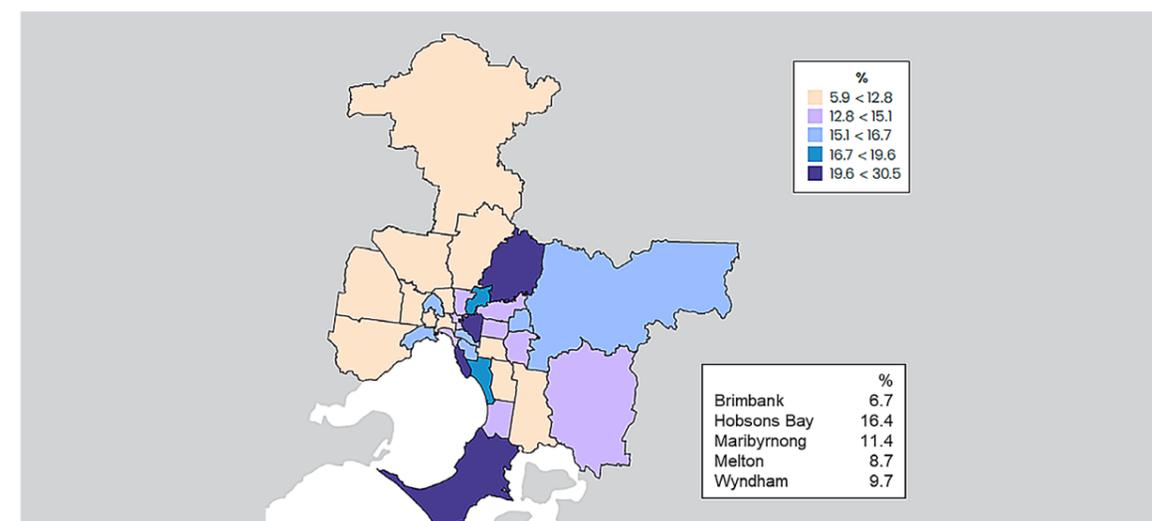
Limited public transport options increases time and reduces convenience of sport participation. This provides added impetus to the remedies proposed under the Transport pillar.

It is unlikely a coincidence that there is a correspondence between the areas of low sports participation and pockets of serious place-based disadvantage featured in Figure 13 in the next Section. The cost of participation (membership fees, equipment, uniforms, travel) can be a real barrier. A focus on addressing serious place-based disadvantage, as is proposed under the upcoming Economic and Social Inclusion pillar, could have a positive impact on participation rates.

The region's highly culturally and linguistically diverse populations may hold themselves back based on concerns regarding the sensitivity and inclusivity of sports programs. The continued evolution of programs to meet the needs of these communities through the development of sports and cultural hubs can help build understanding and connection through the power of sport.

Despite its size and growth, the West of Melbourne lacks a stadium to host elite sport events. It looks increasingly uncertain that it will get one anytime soon, with plans to build a Western United FC stadium in Tarneit being put on ice following the Club being stripped of its A-League licence. Why this matters is because access to viewing elite sports can lead to higher engagement in community sports. Elite sports provide positive role models, inspiration and demonstration, local media visibility, and a sense of local pride. A stadium to host elite sport events would also provide a welcome boost to economic activity in the region as fans travel from other parts of the State and country to cheer on their teams.

Figure 9: Sport participation rates in Metropolitan Melbourne in 2022



Source: VicHealth (2024) Sport participation in Victoria 2015–2022, Research Summary.

³⁶ Fresh Select (2025) op cit.

³⁷ DTP (2025a) op cit.

³⁸ GWW (2025) op cit.

³⁹ DTP website (<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/Data-spatial-and-insights/melbournes-vegetation-heat-and-land-use-data#heading-5>)

⁴⁰ DTP (2025b) Plan for Victoria, A Plan by Victorians for Victorians..

⁴¹ GWW (2025) op cit

⁴² WAGA's members are the Cities of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham, and the Shire of Moorabool.

⁴³ WoMEDA is grateful for the written and further advice provided by the Western Football Netball League that has informed discussion under this header.



Enable lifelong learning

The analysis shared in Appendix 2 finds that not only is the population of the West of Melbourne large and fast growing, it is also young and increasingly skilled. The share of the working aged population holding a non-school qualification is increasing as the share of young workers obtaining qualifications grows and as older less qualified workers retire.

The challenge is to continue to support the learning of all – school-aged children, the further education of school leavers, and the upskilling and reskilling of workers from the West.

Schooling

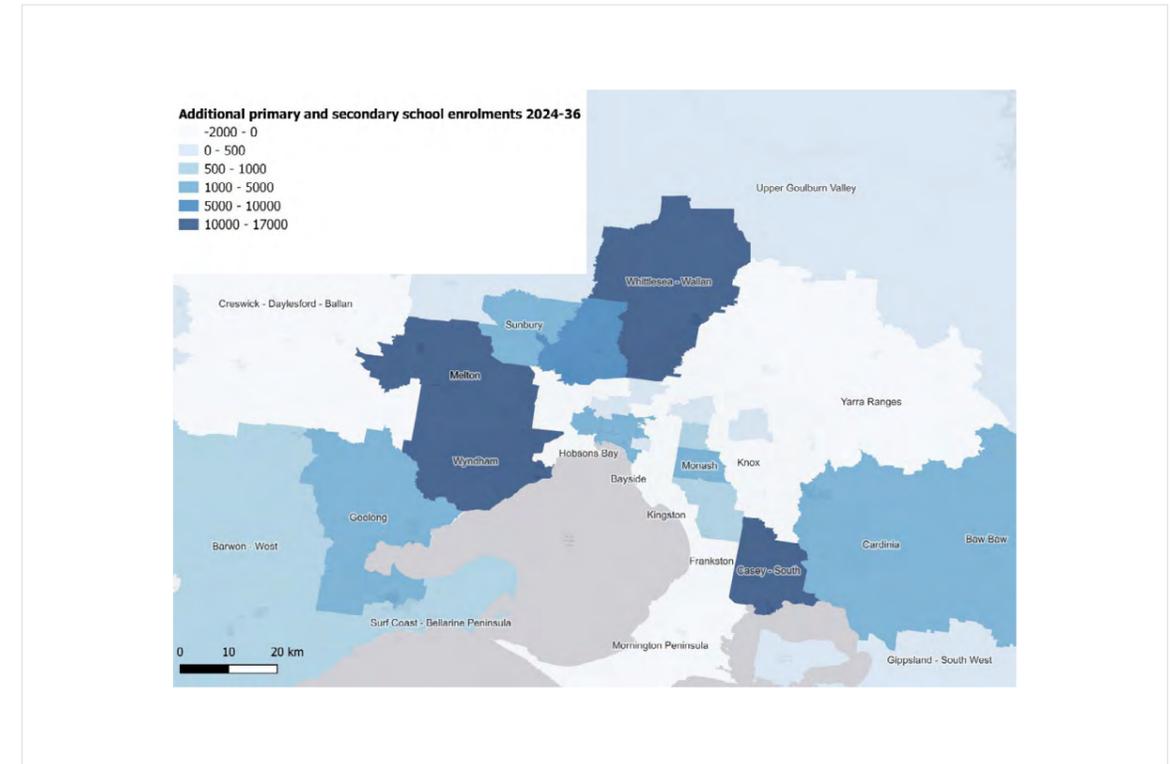
When it comes to schooling, this will be no mean feat. In Wyndham Vale alone a new prep class is born every week⁴⁴. More generally, official projections are that Melbourne’s outer western LGAs can expect additional primary and secondary school enrolments to number between 10,000 and 17,000 over the period 2024 to 2036. Figure 10 shows where the growth is occurring.

The need for more schools is now. RMIT University researchers have calculated that children in Melton and Wyndham live further from their schools than students in any other council area of metropolitan Melbourne⁴⁵.

All sectors are responding. Thirty-two new government schools in Wyndham and Melton LGAs have opened since 2017 and a further seven new schools are in the pipeline over the next two years⁴⁶. Six new independent schools opened in the West between 2019 and 2024⁴⁷.

The momentum has to be maintained. State Government prioritisation of future capital commitments in the outer West, and encouragement of the establishment and growth of quality private schools, are essential. So too will be supporting the quality and growth of the local teaching workforce.

Figure 10: Projected growth in primary and secondary enrolments in government schools by 2036



Source: Infrastructure Victoria (2024) Learning for life, Preparing kindergarten, school and TAFE.

⁴⁴ VU (2025) op cit.

⁴⁵ Towell, N and Butt, C (2025) “These students’ superpower guarantees VCE success, but the western suburbs need more schools,” The Age, 22 August.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

Post-school learning

The outer West⁴⁸ is also where official projections predict a large increase in demand for tertiary training, particularly in the areas of construction and health⁴⁹. Melton's new TAFE, to be operated by Kangan Institute and completed in 2028, will offer courses in construction and associated trades, ensuring the demands of residents in the LGA are met. In Wyndham, Infrastructure Victoria has specifically called for the expansion of VU's Werribee TAFE facilities to train more students and fill skill gaps⁵⁰.

As a dual sector provider, VU is uniquely poised to meet not just the vocational and technical training needs of Melbourne's West but also its residents' aspirations for a higher education. Five out of six of VU's campuses in Victoria are located in the region⁵¹.

Work and learning

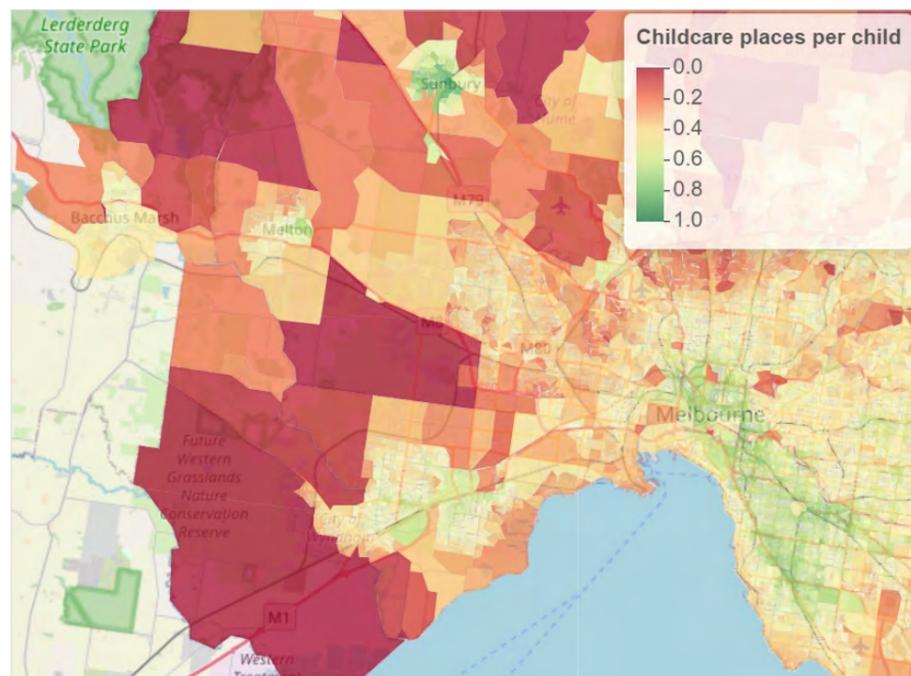
It is necessary but not sufficient to grow the skills of residents of the West. It is also necessary to facilitate connections with employers and industries. Particularly for the young workers in Melbourne's West who are much more likely than their more mature aged peers to struggle to find work (refer discussion on the 'age gap' under the Economic and Social Inclusion pillar). This is what the LLENs do. Three LLENs service Melbourne's West: WynBay LLEN, Future Connect and MMV LLEN. Just like their 28 counterparts based outside of the region, they work tirelessly to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders to meet the workforce development needs of local industry by creating education to employment pathways, opportunities for work-based learning, and by providing vital industry exposure to practitioners and students⁵². They are funded by the State Government under contracts due to expire at the end of this year. Continued public investment is necessary to secure a future where the youth of Melbourne's West can contribute meaningfully to the region's workforce, and where local industry can play an important part in developing their talent pipeline.

Plan regionally for better childcare and health services

Childcare

The age-structure of Melbourne's West is young (refer Appendix 2). Yet the outer West is characterised by childcare deserts⁵³. The heat map shared in Figure 11 finds that there is a pitiful 0.0 to 0.2 childcare places per child in Werribee, Wyndham Vale, Tarneit, Rockbank-Mount Cottrell and Bacchus Marsh.

Figure 11: Childcare 'deserts' in Melbourne's West



Source: Mitchell Institute website.

Access to high quality, culturally respectful and affordable childcare is a basic right that should not be dependent on postcode. Likewise, parents' choice to work should not be constrained by the absence of these services. There is an imperative for State and local governments to work together and plan regionally for better childcare services.

⁴⁸ Alongside north and south-eastern growth areas.

⁴⁹ Infrastructure Victoria (2024) Learning for life, Preparing kindergarten, school and TAFE.

⁵⁰ Infrastructure Victoria (2025) Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy, recommendation 4.

⁵¹ VU's five campuses in Melbourne's West are: Footscray Park, Footscray Nicholson, St Albans, Sunshine and Werribee.

Health services

Parents' ability to work should not be compromised by access to quality health services for either themselves or their dependents. However, this is not automatic given the West of Melbourne's large, fast growing population with a complexity of the health care needs. The West of Melbourne is characterised by a high level of chronic disease, rich cultural diversity and patches of low socio-economic status, the combination of which contributes to a high burden of disease and complex needs. Western Health estimates that it is serving only around 60 percent of people within its catchment⁵⁴, meaning that the rest need to go elsewhere. This is most often to Melbourne's CBD which, quite apart from the personal inconvenience and the pressure on health service providers in the CBD, means more cars on roads with all the attendant consequences previously discussed.

Meeting and managing current and future demand necessitates a greater attention to preventative health, better connected and more integrated services, and expansion of those services. Planning needs to occur at the regional level.

Prevention and integration serve to ease demand pressures. This is being attempted through integration with community providers to support patients to better manage their conditions at home. There is much goodwill and engagement from hospitals, health care service providers and other players to strengthen existing relationships.

While this can ease demand pressures, it cannot erase them. Expansion is vital. The new Footscray Hospital will cater to approximately 15,000 more patients each year than the hospital it replaces. Work on the Melton Hospital must continue after the first phase of development is completed in order for it to grow in line with the needs of its patient base. But it is in and around Brimbank and Wyndham where the demand and burden of disease continues to be high, which requires an ongoing efforts to uplift capability and capacity over time.



⁵² WynBay LLEN (2025) Submission.

⁵³ Hurley, P, Matthews, H and Pennicuk, S. (2022). Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare? Mitchell Institute, Victoria University.

⁵⁴ Western Health's catchment overlaps with much of what is referred to in this Strategy as the West of Melbourne. Its primary catchment includes Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribymong, Melton, Hume (Sunbury), and Moonee Valley (West). It also provides services to its secondary catchment area of Wyndham.

Pillar VI Economic and Social Inclusion

Economic and social inclusion in the West of Melbourne is not just about fairness. It is about unlocking the full potential of a diverse, growing population, ensuring resilience in the face of change, and creating a balanced, prosperous region.

Inclusive growth ensures that all residents can participate in and contribute to the economy and society and reap the benefits of greater prosperity.

A planned approach to economic and social inclusion is especially important in the West of Melbourne because of the region’s demographics and economic transition.

With regards to the demographics, the West of Melbourne’s population has grown rapidly on the back of high rates of natural increase and a large migrant intake. The former makes for higher than average youth dependency (refer Appendix 2). The latter underscores the need for inclusive policies as, without them, inequality can widen, with newcomers struggling to access jobs, affordable housing, and services.

Economic transition has seen the West of Melbourne challenged under a legacy of industrial change. Deindustrialisation has meant the loss of traditional manufacturing jobs, particularly in the industrial zone (discussed under the Industry pillar). Economic inclusion is essential to re-skill workers and connect them to emerging industries.

Three important foci are addressing the West of Melbourne’s relatively low and uneven overall level of educational attainment, bringing down youth unemployment, and tackling pockets of serious place-based disadvantage.

Address relatively low and uneven education attainment

Residents of Melbourne’s West are less qualified than others living elsewhere.

On average the proportions whose highest non-school qualification are Certificate III or higher, or at the Bachelor level or above, are less than the averages for Greater Melbourne and Victoria. Table 8 in Appendix 2 shares the comparative statistics by age cohorts. The good news is that as workers of the West of more advanced ages retire and young well credentialed workers feature more prominently in the metrics, the proportions will improve.

That is not to say there remains little more to do to shore up the skill levels in Melbourne’s West. Table 6 conveys the large geographic disparities in the shares of residents with a Bachelor level qualification or above.

Table 6 Residents in Melbourne West’s LGAs with a Bachelor Degree or higher qualification
People aged 15 years and over, by LGA, percent, 2021

LGA	SHARE
Melbourne – West	27.8
Brimbank	19.8
Hobsons Bay	31.8
Maribyrnong	40.8
Melton	21.6
Wyndham	32.4

Source: Derived from ABS Census for Population and Housing data for 2021.

Note: The figures here are for a different point in time and are for a different age category than those shared in Table 8 in Appendix 2 and are, therefore, not comparable.



Education attainment in Brimbank is concerningly low. The LGA’s future is, nonetheless, looking brighter as it is in good shape in terms of schools, TAFE, university and community partners. It is home to the Sunshine Skills Hub, Ambulance Victoria, the Centre of Excellence in Paramedicine, the Brimbank Tech School and VU’s St Albans and Sunshine campuses. Continued investment in the St Albans campus is key raising skills levels and local development.

Initiatives designed to bridge the gaps would not merely support economic and social inclusion, as discussed in Appendix 2, they would fuel productivity gains.

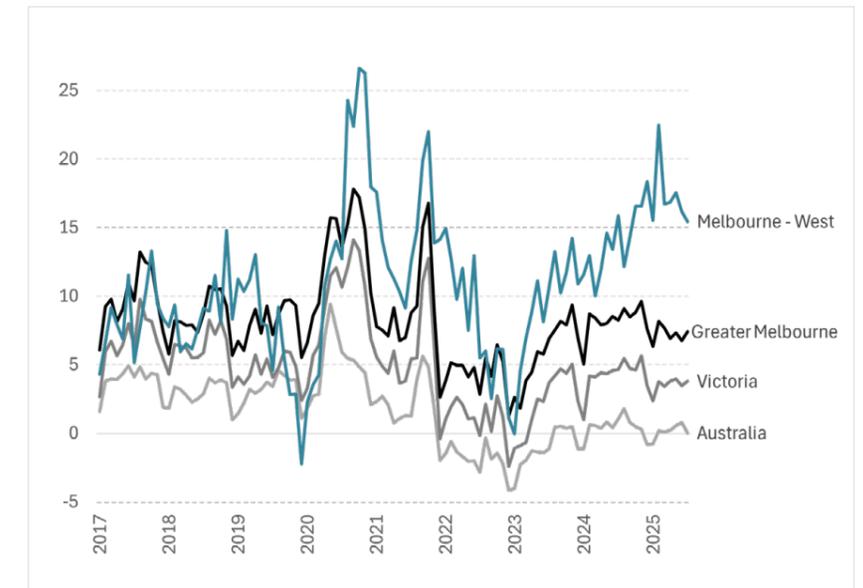
VU’s positive track record for equity and excellence⁵⁵ positions it well to provide a world-class further education and training experience, no matter the socio-economic status of its students. This matters to meeting aspirations under the Universities Accord for greater and more equitable participation in tertiary education.

Bring down youth unemployment

Table 7 in Appendix 2 reveals the concerning reality that it the West’s youngest workers, many of whom will have recently entered the labour force for the first time, are struggling the most. More than one in 10 of those aged between 15 and 24 are unemployed.

While it is common for youth workers to have poorer labour force outcomes than their more mature aged peers, in recent years the ‘age gap’ between outcomes in the West of Melbourne has gone from bad to worse. Figure 12 compares the ‘age gap’ in the employment to population ratio for the West with the same for Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia. Concerningly there is a widening gulf in outcomes.

Figure 12: ‘Age gap’ in the employment to population ratio
Percentage point difference between mature aged and youth workers



Source: ABS (2025) Detailed Labour Force Statistics, August.

More needs to be done to provide jobs for all. This includes supporting the work of the LLENs, discussed in the previous section on the Liveability pillar, to connect work and learning. It also suggests the desirability of a pointed focus on young workers under the Jobs and Skills pillar.

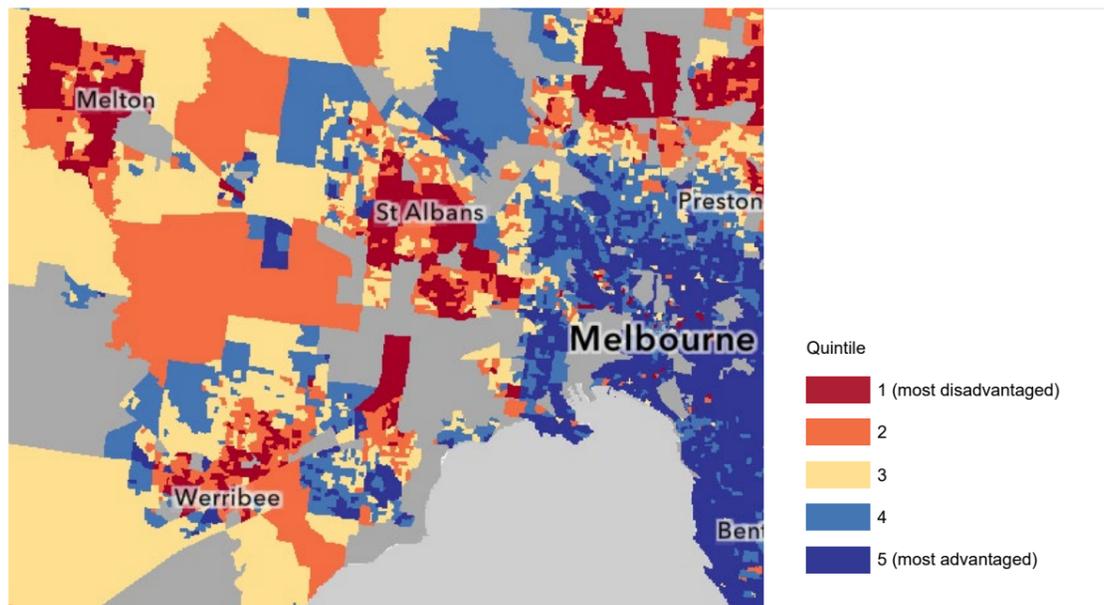
⁵⁵ In the latest available Student Experience Survey VU ranked number one in the State for the quality of the entire education experience, teaching quality, peer engagement and skills development (visit [https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/student-experience-survey-\(ses\)](https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/student-experience-survey-(ses))).



Tackle pockets of serious place-based disadvantage

As some West of Melbourne communities gentrify, the region continues to have significant pockets of serious place-based disadvantage, particularly in Sunshine West, St Albans, Deer Park, Melton and parts of Hoppers Crossing and Werribee, as indicated by the red in the map below.

Figure 13: Relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in the West of Melbourne
Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage at the Statistical Area 1 level in 2021



Source: ABS (2025) Detailed Labour Force Statistics, August.

Tackling disadvantage requires a multifaceted approach. This approach involves a range of interventions, including the availability of affordable housing, preventative health care, quality early childhood education and care, an ongoing commitment to good schools and enhanced education provision, and a strategy to engage disengaged youth.

In places of serious intergenerational, multiple and complex disadvantage, a coordinated place-based approach to tackling entrenched disadvantage is encouraged. VU's Mitchell Institute has been exploring opportunities for such approaches in its Pathways in Place Program, focussed on Brimbank, funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

The primary aim of this Strategic Foundations Paper is to encourage an approach that fosters economic development and local jobs in the West of Melbourne. If successful, it will enhance the ability of place-based disadvantage to be tackled, but entrenched place-based disadvantage is a wicked problem, which will not go away without deliberate strategies.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Feedback on the Consultation Paper	41
Appendix 2 - The 4Ps Driving Future Prospects	42
Population	42
Participation	44
Productivity	46
Place	47

Appendix 1 - Feedback on the Consultation Paper

In December 2024 WoMEDA released a Consultation Paper, Towards an Economic Development Strategy for the West of Melbourne 2025. The Consultation Paper:

- considered the current and projected future population and labour force participation of residents of the West;
- outlined the social, economic and environmental benefits of Melbourne having not one but multiple major centres of economic activity – is polycentric – and includes the three West of Melbourne precincts identified back in 2017 – Footscray, Sunshine and East Werribee - plus a potential fourth – Cobblebank in Melton; and
- canvassed the priorities for the region over the decade ahead: building on the successes in the precincts, fast tracking transport and logistic initiatives, growing and diversifying the housing stock, investing in amenities, offering integrated childcare, education and other family services, becoming a greener and more circular economy, and maintaining the momentum in health.

West of Melbourne stakeholders were invited to share their insights and intelligence on the priorities. Overarching themes raised in written and verbal submissions received, and stakeholder consultation sessions held, were that:

- Greater polycentricity holds the promise of businesses locating new primary or secondary workplaces in satellite cities, jobs closer to home, and shorter commutes.
- The case study of Parramatta, a satellite city within Greater Western Sydney, should be examined as a model for progress and a blueprint for transformation.
- Done well, the development of industry cluster strategies focused on one or more of the precincts can have an outsized impact on the region.
- Information is key to encouraging greater private sector investment and addressing negative perceptions.
- Public investment in transport infrastructure, employment networks, education and training, housing, utilities, amenities and health is needed to provide greater certainty, complement private sector effort, and make the West an attractive place to work, study, live, visit and play.
- The ARL with Sunshine as a super hub is essential infrastructure that should be prioritised and hastened.
- There is a golden opportunity for the West to become a popular tourism and visitor destination, which will require careful planning, promotion and investment in existing attractions and new developments.
- Cultural diversity in the West is a strength.

This Strategic Foundations Paper takes on board the feedback and developments since the release of the Consultation Paper and looks out to 2050. It is intended as a catalyst for further discussion on the pillars and priorities for action raised within. Starting with the October 2025 West of Melbourne Summit. And continuing with the Western Growth Dialogue between key stakeholders in industry, the community and local, State and Commonwealth governments.

Appendix 2 – The 4Ps Driving Future Prospects

The Introduction to this Strategic Foundations Paper introduces the four Ps that are driving the future fortunes of the West of Melbourne – Population, Participation, Productivity and Place – and provides a snapshot of the strengths and weaknesses associated with each. This Appendix elaborates on the points raised there. The ideal is to capitalise on the strengths and to overcome the weaknesses.

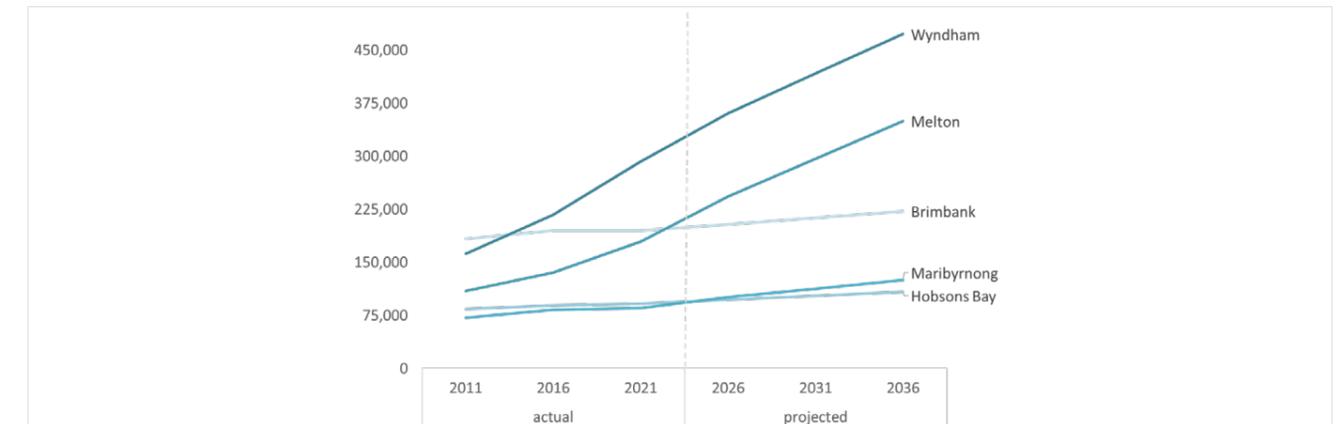
Population

Growth

Since the turn of the century, the population of Melbourne’s West has been the fastest growing in Australia⁵⁶. Over the past three Censuses Melbourne’s Western Region grew at an annual average rate of 3.0 percent - faster than all other regions and well ahead of the rate of 2.1 percent for the entirety of Metropolitan Melbourne. In 2021, with a Census count of 963,971, the Western Region was Melbourne’s third largest region, positioned just behind Melbourne’s Southern and Northern regions. By the time of the next Census, it is forecast to be the largest region by population. Which is where it is expected to stay until 2046. In 2051, it is projected that it will have just been overtaken by the Northern Region. At that time the population of the Western Region will have almost doubled to 1.8 million. To put that into perspective, that is as big as the 2021 Census night count of South Australia’s population. Figure 2 in the Introduction illustrates these growth expectations.

When we drill down and examine growth in the West’s LGAs, as is done in Figure 14, we find that it is unevenly distributed. The fastest growing areas, not merely in Melbourne’s West but in Greater Melbourne⁵⁷, lie in the outer West. Wyndham and Melton are large and are projected to keep on growing substantially. Wyndham grew at an annual average rate of 6.1 percent over the decade to 2021, and is projected to keep on growing each year over the next 15 years at the average rate of 3.3 percent. The equivalent rates for Melton are 5.1 percent and 4.6 percent.

Figure 14: Actual and projected populations in selected LGAs in Melbourne’s West



Source: Actual – ABS Census of Population and Housing; Projected – DTP (2023) VIF population and household projections, second release, December.

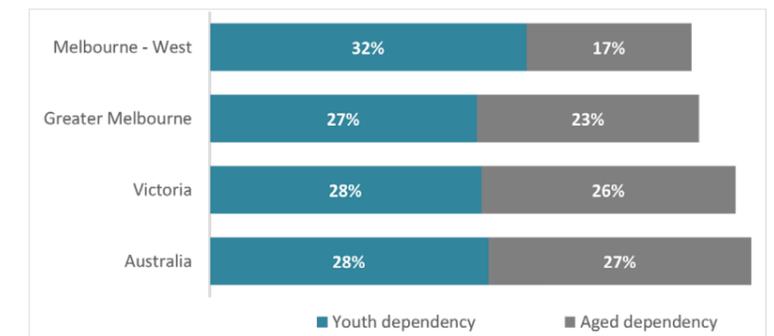
Age

The age structure of Melbourne’s West is relatively young. Its median age of 34 is three years less than for Greater Melbourne and four years less than that for Victoria and Australia. A relatively high proportion (67.2 percent) of the population of Melbourne’s West are of working age (aged between 15 and 64 years).

This makes for a low overall dependency ratio: the ratio of people of working age to the young and old who depend on them in Melbourne’s West is 49 percent. This compares favourably against the dependency ratios of 50 percent, 53 percent and 55 percent respectively for Greater Melbourne, Victoria and all of Australia.

It is not just the West of Melbourne’s relatively low dependency ratio that sets it apart. It is its composition. It has high youth dependency and low aged dependency. That is, while the economic burden of providing and caring for the old is relatively low, the West of Melbourne has a particularly large burden to bear when it comes to taking care of its young.

Figure 15: Dependency ratios



Source: Derived from ABS Census for Population and Housing data for 2021.

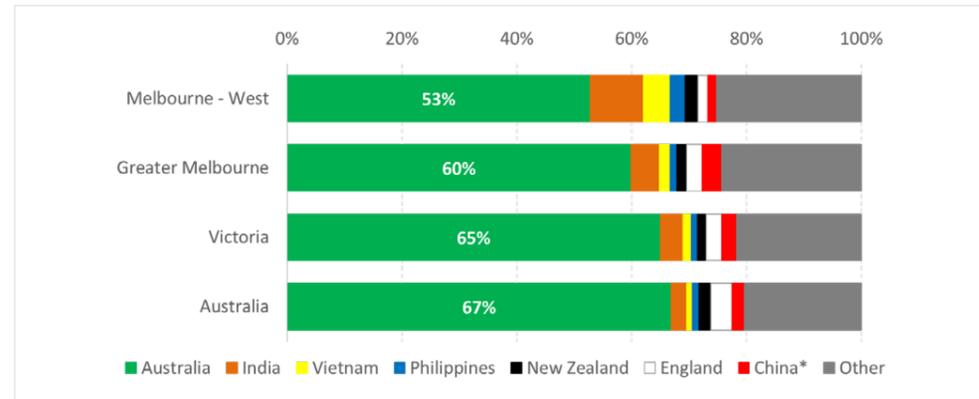
⁵⁶ CoPS (2024) WoMEDA Economic Briefing 2024.1, 30 May.

⁵⁷ DTP (2023) Victoria in Future 2023.

Cultural diversity

The population of the West of Melbourne is also more ethnically diverse than Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia. This is because it continues to be a popular place for migrants to settle. Melbourne’s West is home to relatively large numbers of people from India, Vietnam, the Philippines and New Zealand. The West of Melbourne’s multiculturalism is an asset that should be celebrated and leveraged. Under the Industry pillar we propose that it and the associated entrepreneurship be leveraged for economic dynamism.

Figure 16: Cultural diversity
Country of birth



Source: Derived from ABS Census for Population and Housing data for 2021.

Participation

Residents of the West of Melbourne want to work. A relatively large 68.5 percent of its population aged 15 years and over are employed. This is higher than the equivalent shares for Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia. With a labour force participation rate of 72 percent, even more want to work.

However, not all who want to work can work. The unemployment rate in Melbourne’s West is ahead of the comparators in Table 7.

Table 7 Labour force status
Percent, July 2025

	EMPLOYMENT TO POPULATION RATE	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE	PARTICIPATION RATE
Melbourne - West	68.5	4.6	71.9
Male	72.2	5.6	76.5
Female	64.8	3.5	67.2
Youth (15-24 years)	55.6	11.2	62.6
Mature aged (25 and over)	71.1	3.5	73.7
Greater Melbourne	66.3	4.5	69.4
Victoria	64.7	4.4	67.6
Australia	64.1	4.2	66.9

Source: ABS (2025) Detailed Labour Force Statistics, August.

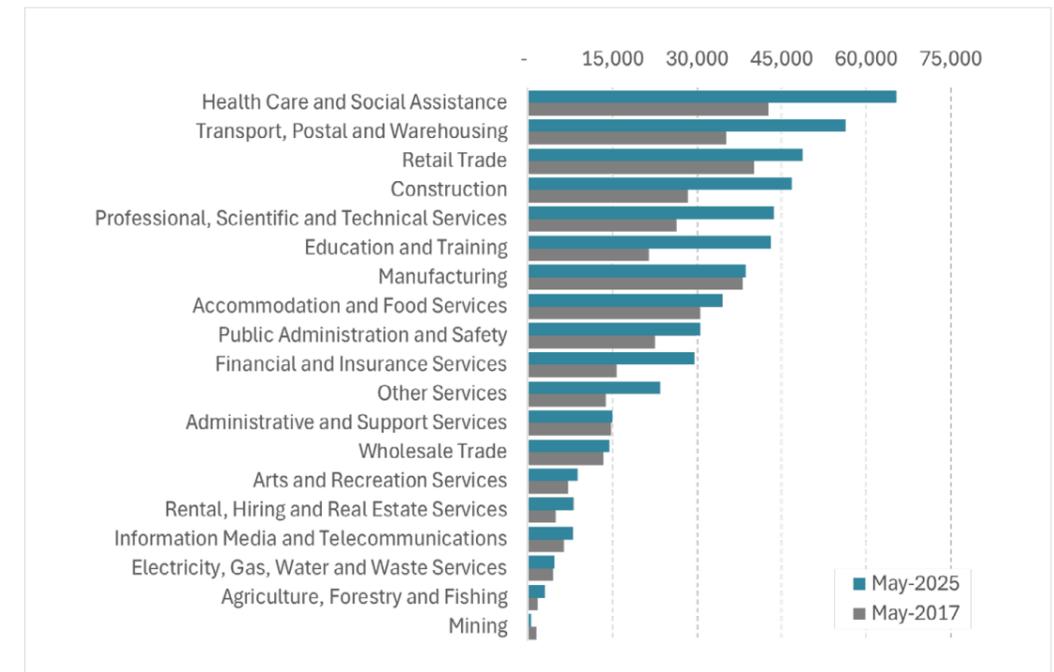
This is despite the generally growing number of workers from Melbourne’s West who are employed. What is happening is that job growth has not been sufficient to absorb the even faster growing numbers joining the labour force. The latter has been considerable due to the double impacts of a growing population aged 15 and older and the high rate at which they are participating in the labour force.

It is not workers from the West who have been in the labour force for some time who are experiencing difficulties. It is the West’s youngest workers, many of whom will have recently entered the labour force for the first time, who are struggling the most. More than to one in 10 (11 percent) of those aged between 15 and 24 are unemployed. The Economic and Social Inclusion pillar considers the plight of the West of Melbourne’s young workers.

The sectors and roles employing workers from the West

The 2017 Strategy anticipated that employment growth of West of Melbourne’s residents would be largest in health care, logistics, retail trade, construction, accommodation and food, professional and technical services, and education and training. Much of that has proved true. However, the intervention of a global pandemic meant that growth in the food and accommodation sectors has only recently recovered sufficiently to surpass 2017 employment levels. On the other hand, employment in financial and insurance services sector has proven to be greater than anticipated.

Figure 17: Employment of West of Melbourne residents by industry

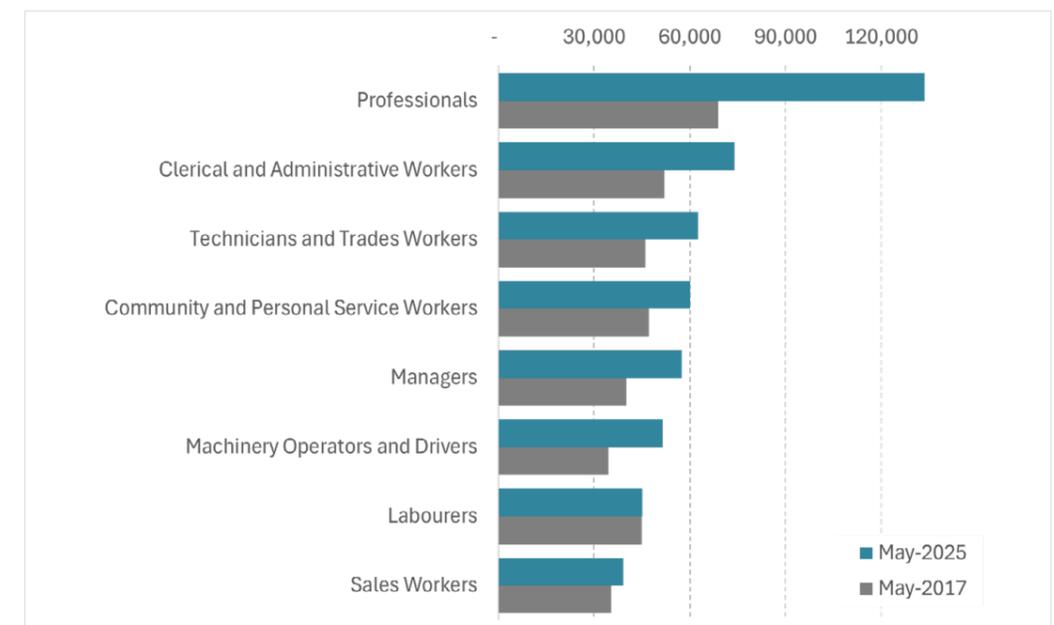


Source: ABS (2025) Detailed Labour Force Statistics, August.

How this growth translates at the occupation level is that there has been almost a doubling in workers in Melbourne’s West who are working in professional occupations. While the growth is undeniably huge, the larger comparative employment share for Greater Melbourne suggests that there is still room to grow. The associated positive is that professional roles typically employ highly educated people and pay above average salaries. One downside, which we pick up on again in the discussion that follows, is that these roles tend not to be local. Another is that, if they are, there are significant disparities across the region.

Employment in the lesser skilled occupations, such as labourers and sales workers has been more stagnant.

Figure 18: Employment of West of Melbourne residents by major occupation



Source: ABS (2025) Detailed Labour Force Statistics, August.

⁵⁸ In May 2025 26 percent of workers in Melbourne’s West were working in professional occupations. The comparative employment share for Greater Melbourne was 31 percent.

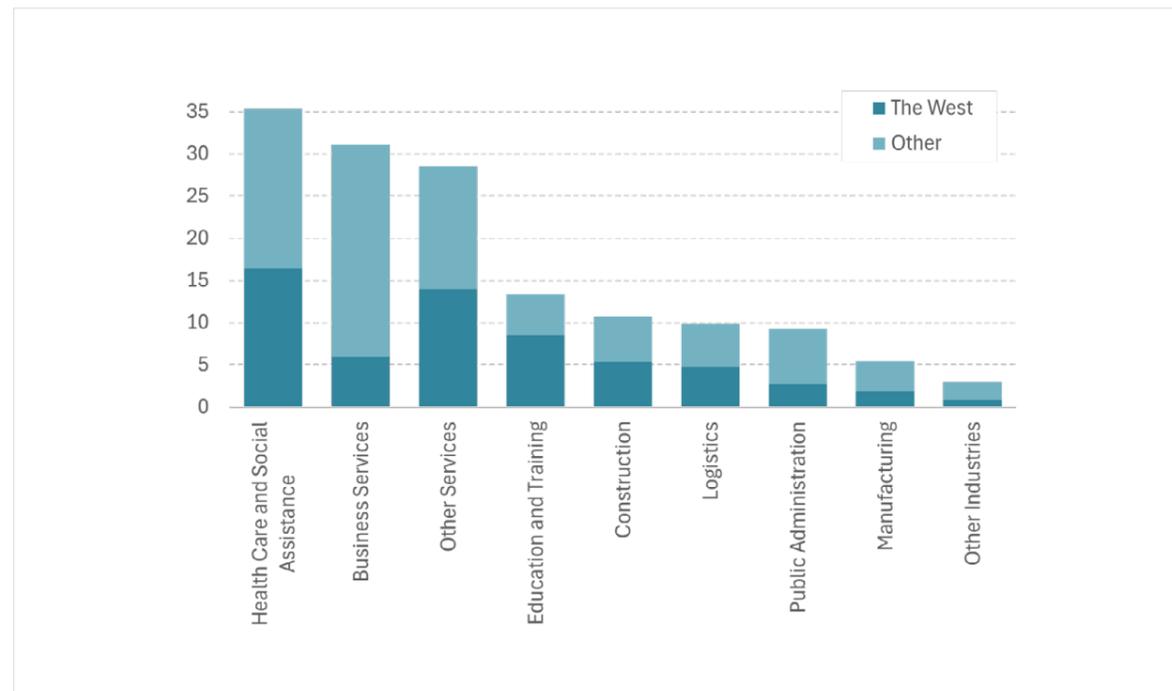
Where they are working

The current reality is one where employers are concentrated in Melbourne’s CBD while most population growth lies outside the CBD, particularly in the West.

In 2024, 47.9 percent of workers from Melbourne’s West commuted to locations outside of the region⁵⁹. If nothing is done to bring jobs closer to workers, modelling by CoPS on behalf of WoMEDA finds that by 2034 the share of West of Melbourne workers commuting to jobs outside of the region is expected to climb to over half (50.4 percent) of a much expanded workforce⁶⁰.

As depicted in Figure 19, how the employment growth is shared between the West of Melbourne and elsewhere differs by industry sector, with large shares of the considerable growth in the health care and social assistance and business services sectors expected to come from outside the region.

Figure 19: Employment growth, residents of the West by Industry and location of work, 2024-2034
Persons employed ('000s)



Source: CoPS (2025) WOMEDA Economic Briefing 2025.1.

Under the Transport pillar we learn that average commute times, which are already high for those travelling from the outer West are, in the absence of change, destined to get even higher as increased congestion strains the existing transport infrastructure and services. This detracts from commuters quality of life and health, comes at a high opportunity cost given the alternative ways commuters could better spend their time, and contributes unfavourably to energy consumption, emissions, associated climate change and noise pollution.

The flipside for those who choose to avoid the long commute, is a lack access to jobs that make best use of their skills. This means that too often those jobseekers settle for employment in the West for which they are overqualified. Not only does that come at a personal cost, the West of Melbourne is worse off for not taking greater advantage of its talent base. As we have just discovered, the region has a large and fast growing blue collar workforce.

⁵⁹ CoPS (2025) WOMEDA Economic Briefing 2025.1

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Productivity

Skill levels

Empirically, increases in the supply of skilled workers predict future increases in regional productivity.

The reality is that residents of Melbourne’s West are less qualified than others living elsewhere. On average the proportions whose highest non-school qualification are Certificate III or higher (62 percent), or at the Bachelor level or above (35 percent), are less than the averages for Greater Melbourne and Victoria. Table 8 shares the comparative statistics.

Table 8 Highest non-school qualification held
Share of people aged between 15 and 64 years.

2022-23	CERT III OR HIGHER	BACHELOR DEGREE OR HIGHER
Melbourne - West	62%	35%
15-24 years	21%	9%
25-34 years	89%	63%
35-44 years	83%	46%
45-54 years	66%	38%
55-64 years	53%	30%
Greater Melbourne	68%	44%
Victoria	67%	40%
Australia	65%	35%
2018-19	-	-
Melbourne - West	54%	30%

Source: ABS Qualifications and Work, 2018-19 and 2022-23, accessed using TableBuilder Pro.

Note: The figures here are for a different point in time and are for a different age category than those shared in Table 6 under the Economic and Social Inclusion pillar and are, therefore, not comparable.

On closer examination of the numbers there is cause for optimism. The averages for the West are being impacted adversely by the region’s older residents aged between 55 and 64 years. Those who are of prime working age – aged between 25 and 44 years – have much more impressive education outcomes, well ahead of city, state and national averages.

Over just four years, from 2018-19 to 2022-23, we have already witnessed a significant step up in the average outcomes for the region. Large positive shifts can reasonably be expected over future years as Melbourne West’s young complete their qualifications and the status of older residents no longer impact the metrics.

That is not to say that there remains little more to do to shore up the skill levels and thereby productivity in Melbourne’s West. Table 6 in the discussion on the Economic and Social Inclusion pillar conveys the large geographic disparities in the shares of residents with a Bachelor level qualification or above. If the gaps could be bridged the productivity gains would be great.

⁶¹ Moretti, E (2004) “Workers’ Education, Spillovers, and Productivity: Evidence from Plant-Level Production Functions.” American Economic Review 94 (3), pp 656–90.

Place-based industry clusters

When geographically proximate, complementary industries and others within their ecosystem work together to maximise complementarities, access latent capacity, create new capacity, and/or address constraints, they can have an outsized effect on all within their cluster⁶².

A great example of where this is happening in practice in Melbourne’s West is SHWEP. This is an established and growing location for medical, health, community, education and research services. It is centred around Sunshine Hospital and includes the Western Centre for Health Research and Education, the Joan Kirner Women’s and Children’s Hospital, and other community and business healthcare and social assistance service providers. With foresight, planning and continued investment, best use can be made of land within the precinct and more than 7200 jobs by 2051 can be realised.

This is a great example, but it is the exception rather than the norm. The norm is insufficient coordinated effort to either locate complementary industry players in proximate distance to each other, access latent capacity, create new capacity, and/or address constraints. In the discussion on the Industry pillar we identify candidate industry clusters for further exploration. In the absence of deliberate action, related industries in the West will continue to fail to work together to best advantage as a cluster to realise their combined potential.

Place

Land availability and affordability

The outer West LGAs of Melton and Wyndham have healthy pipelines of greenfield industrial, commercial and residential land coming on stream. The approach of local governments is proactive and strategic, designed to accommodate current and future demand and enhance employment and growth⁶³. The satellite image shared at Figure 8 not only reveals the West of Melbourne’s large and prominent industrial zone, it captures the swathes of undeveloped land in the outer West. This suggests that, so long as there is demand, this is a strategy that can be sustained.

By supplying greenfield land at scale, unit area prices are typically lower than alternative locations in Greater Melbourne. This is a deliberate tactic designed to drive demand.

However, while the affordability and availability of land are necessary, they are not sufficient, to drive demand. Demand is also a function of things like accessibility, amenity and other matters covered by this Strategic Foundations Paper.

Gateway

The West of Melbourne is a multi-directional gateway. To the east, the West bumps up against the Melbourne CBD and the neighbouring North West region. In the westward and northward directions are Victoria’s largest regional economies – Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. Interstate connections to South Australia are through Melbourne’s West. The Western Ring Road connects the region to New South Wales. As home to the Port of Melbourne and the Melbourne and Avalon airports, Melbourne’s western region is also the State’s gateway to the rest of the world, whether that be for trade or travel purposes.

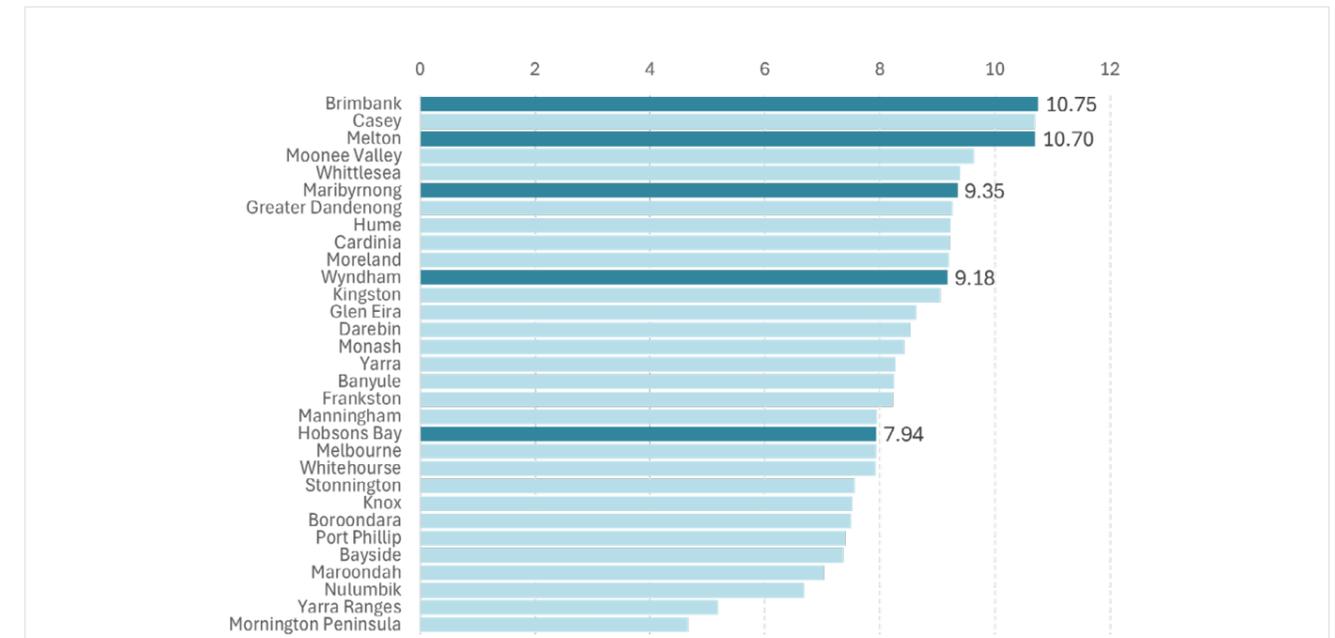
Such an important gateway deserves an effective and efficient transport infrastructure, which is why transport is an explicit focus in this Strategic Foundations Paper.

Climate

In addition to being destined to become Greater Melbourne’s most populated region by the next Census, another West of Melbourne defining characteristic is that it is warmer and drier than the other regions in Greater Melbourne. The interplay of both poses particular challenges.

LGAs in the West of Melbourne rank amongst the hottest in the Greater Melbourne area. Urban heat island (UHI) readings, shared in Figure 20, indicate that the deviation of temperatures in the West lie well above non-urban baselines.

Figure 20: UHI reading by LGA °C in 2018



Source: DTP website.

Rainfall in Melbourne’s West (approximately 500 mm/year) can be less than half of that in Melbourne’s East⁶⁴.

In the absence of change, more people means more demand for water, more energy usage, more emissions, more sewerage, more waste. Hotter and drier conditions means less water availability from direct rainfall, more energy usage, and more emissions.

There is a clear need to do more to promote the sustainability of the environment in the West. We prescribe nurturing a circular economy industry cluster under the Industry pillar and, under the Liveability pillar, supporting initiatives to expand the coverage provided by the tree canopy.

Preparedness

The pressures of population growth on place, include but extend well beyond the sustainability challenges just discussed. That is just one of the multitude of growing pains that are ailing the region. Others include the sufficiency of the transport infrastructure, housing stock, local amenities, childcare services, schooling and post-school provision, and health services. All are considered within this Strategic Foundations Paper.

⁶² Guzman et al (2024) “Accelerating Innovation Ecosystems: The Promise and Challenges of Regional Innovation Engines,” Entrepreneurship and Innovation

⁶³ City of Melton (2024) Melton Employment and Industrial Land Strategy and Wyndham City (2022) Wyndham Industrial Land Use Strategy.

⁶⁴ Greening the West Steering Committee (2020) Strategic plan 2020-2025.



WoMEDA

WEST OF MELBOURNE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE INC

WESTERN GROWTH

UNLOCKING MELBOURNE'S ECONOMIC ENGINE

Strategic Foundations Paper to Initiate the Western Growth Dialogue to
Supercharge the Economic and Social Future of Melbourne's West