Infrastructure Victoria

All Things Considered

Exploring options for Victoria’s 30-year infrastructure strategy

ENQUIRIES
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INTRODUCTION

La Trobe University occupies a unique place in Victoria’s education, research and innovation systems, with campuses and research facilities spanning Melbourne, its suburbs and regional cities of Bendigo, Wodonga, Shepparton and Mildura. La Trobe’s footprint contributes to a diverse student cohort with high representation from key equity groups, particularly regional, low socioeconomic status and Indigenous students. La Trobe has an excellent research profile: recognised in Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2015 as the best or equal best university in Australia in biological sciences and agriculture.

La Trobe’s mission intersects with many facets of infrastructure needs outlined in ‘All Things Considered’. La Trobe exemplifies high quality education infrastructure (Need 9), provides important services to areas of high population growth (Need 1) and low population growth (Need 2), provides important community services and facilities that foster social cohesion and participation in sport and recreation (Needs 4 and 5). La Trobe acts as an important employment and activity node across each of its campuses, through direct employment and as an employment cluster that partners with innovative businesses (Need 11 and 12). La Trobe’s research capabilities and research focus areas are also a central to resolving challenges around health services (Need 3), water management (Need 17), energy (Need 18) and infrastructure resilience (Need 19).

In short, La Trobe University is a major and critical component of Victorian infrastructure that is emerging as a focal point for further investment. Strategic investment in infrastructure will support La Trobe’s contribution to the social and economic development of Victoria, and is integral to fulfilling the vision outlined in ‘All Things Considered’:

*By 2046, we see a Victoria where everyone can access good jobs, education and services regardless of where they live, where communities are held together by strong bonds, where industries and businesses thrive, and where the environment is valued and protected.*

La Trobe supports the long term vision and systematic approach deployed by Infrastructure Victoria in preparing ‘All Things Considered’. La Trobe is well positioned to be an exemplar for strategic investment that aligns with this vision and the infrastructure needs outlined in ‘All Things Considered’.

La Trobe has bold visions for the transformation of its campuses. Large, strategically positioned and relatively underdeveloped landholdings will become even more important as centres of civic, recreational, educational, health, economic and innovation activity. La Trobe’s Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus has a land base of 235 hectares that provides unparalleled development opportunities. Transcending a narrow focus on a single education centred need, La Trobe University Master Plans interact with a diverse range of social and economic needs. La Trobe University welcomes the opportunity to work with Infrastructure Victoria to make the shared visions of Infrastructure Victoria and La Trobe University a reality.

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1 La Trobe University Campus Master Plans are publicly available on the web, hard copies are available on request: physicalplanning@latrobe.edu.au.
Details for the Bendigo Master Plan are available at: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/io/campus-planning/bendigo
CONNECTION: LA TROBE UNIVERSITY’S PRIMARY INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITY

Construction of a tram line through the Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus would improve connectivity of La Trobe National Employment Cluster

- Construction of a tram line through the La Trobe University Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus will improve connectivity within the La Trobe National Employment Cluster.

- A tram line would unlock the development potential for the Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus, catalysing residential development, business investment and development.

- A tram line will improve access to the employment cluster from the broader region of Melbourne’s North, an area of high population growth.

- A tram line is an important element of the La Trobe Campus Master Plan, which will leverage the Melbourne (Bundoora) campuses extensive land holdings to establish a University Town. This aligns with many infrastructure needs outlined in ‘All Things Considered’, including: High quality education infrastructure; Health services infrastructure; Sports infrastructure for elite and community use; and, Improved access to middle and outer suburban employment centres. University Town will embed advanced technology with each element of its development and be an exemplar for middle-suburban social and economic development.

Other transport options consistent with this priority include:

- Dedicated direct bus routes between key nodes of the La Trobe Employment Cluster (Macleod Train Station, Austin Hospital, Northland Shopping Centre, La Trobe University, Reservoir Train Station).

- Improved service frequency along the Hurstbridge railway line through track duplication and upgrades (already funded through the 2016/17 State Budget).

- Extension of the South Morang Line to Mernda (and in future to Wollert) and improved service frequency providing better access to the employment cluster from Melbourne’s fast growing outer-northern suburbs (already funded through the 2016/17 State Budget).

- Plenty Road Duplication providing better access to the employment cluster from Melbourne’s fast growing outer-northern suburbs (already funded through the 2016/17 State Budget).

- Rail crossing removal in key intersections near the La Trobe Employment Cluster (already a government infrastructure priority).
FEEDBACK ON THE OPTIONS

Specific feedback on infrastructure options with relevance to La Trobe University follows:

1. **Address infrastructure demands in areas with high population growth**

La Trobe University supports the options outlined, and sees much potential for positioning the campus master plan as an exemplar for implementation of the options outlined.

- La Trobe University requires Ministerial approval for some aspects of its land management and development. The redevelopment of the Bundoora site would be supported by appropriate reference to La Trobe Master Plans within proposed changes to Statewide, Subregional and local planning frameworks.

- Effective public transport for Melbourne’s growth areas will be critical for sustaining Victoria’s prosperity. In Melbourne’s North, the La Trobe National Employment Cluster will feature more importantly as a focal point for jobs, education, housing, sport and recreation. La Trobe University encourages Infrastructure Victoria to consider connectivity to the La Trobe National Employment Cluster as a key consideration in growth area service expansion.

- The University Town concept will integrate, through existing partnerships with global technology companies, cutting edge technology into the development of the La Trobe Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus. La Trobe University welcomes the opportunity to work with Infrastructure Victoria in positioning campus development as an exemplar that can inform other developments across the State.

- Whilst not currently listed as an option, the construction of a tram line through the Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus would unlock the development potential of the campus for modest investment with significant contribution to meeting underlying needs.

2. **Address infrastructure challenges in areas with low or negative growth**

Parts of regional Victoria demonstrate low or negative population growth and pose challenges around maintaining an appropriate level of social infrastructure and job creating economic infrastructure. Health and education are two domains where there is scope for reform and innovation. The proposed closure of the Warrnambool campus of Deakin University, for example, highlights the challenges of maintaining the viability of vital services. La Trobe University has a strong and enduring commitment to regional Victoria, and proposes that the following matters be included as priority options for addressing the challenges in areas with low or negative population growth.

- La Trobe has proposed the establishment of the Murray Darling Medical School as a means of focusing on the health needs of inland and regional communities. This would have a transformative effect on regional health systems and would have the explicit mission of contributing to innovative practice models that are aligned to the distinctive health challenges facing regional communities. The Medical School would also leverage Commonwealth investment and increase net migration of high potential human capital to the regions, mitigating the forces that lead to low population growth. State government support via investment in infrastructure and clinical training places is a critical element of gaining approval for this proposal.
- La Trobe University is engaged in innovative dual delivery and enrolment models in partnership with regional TAFEs. By working together and leveraging the strength of partners, there is scope to transform thin regional markets with low levels of participation into more vibrant skills-driven, innovative communities that can better attract and retain people with high potential in regional Victoria. State government support via investment in shared infrastructure, continued support for the dual investment model, and reinvestment in community development and outreach activity will ensure the success of the dual enrolment model.

3. **Respond to increasing pressure on health care, particularly due to ageing**

La Trobe University supports emphasis on a long term strategic approach to health care infrastructure investment. The focus on early intervention is also warranted. Victoria has the potential to lead Australia and the world in early intervention and health education programs.

Investment in research is a critical component of successful early intervention and health education programs. A better understanding of the underlying issues, and knowledge of the efficacy of health promotion programs, requires investment in health research. Victorian government investment as a share of total university research expenditure is falling (from 4.3% in 2006 to 3.8% in 2014). La Trobe University encourages the government to consider how it can best invest in research and research infrastructure, particularly in health research, as a mechanism for better managing increasing pressure on health budgets. An important component of this investment should be focused on regional health costs and the proposed Murray Darling Medical School.

4. **Enable physical activity and participation**
5. **Provide spaces where communities can come together**

Sport provides a focal point for physical activity and participation that brings communities together. Regional sports clubs and facilities are vital elements of community infrastructure and important for community cohesion.

La Trobe has the most comprehensive range of sport-related courses in Australia and undertakes world class sport, exercise and rehabilitation research. La Trobe would welcome the opportunity to leverage its sports related expertise into the development and implementation of the proposed cultural and sports major infrastructure investment framework, and sport and recreational facility investment framework.

La Trobe’s campus masterplans give great priority to sport and community infrastructure. Construction on Stage One of the La Trobe Sports Park commences in 2017, with significant investment in new sports facilities. Key features of Stage one include:

- Sports House with office space for 200 community and elite sport staff, research laboratories and multi-purpose teaching and meeting rooms for community meetings, education and training
- 4 court Indoor highball stadium for netball, basketball and other indoor sports including 2 show courts to seat 1500 people each
- Gymnastics centre and Strength and conditioning training facility
La Trobe University Response to Infrastructure Victoria’s ’All Things Considered’ Options Paper

- 1 x synthetic football (soccer) pitch
- Town Square and pedestrian bridge connection to core campus
- Football change rooms
- Car parking

La Trobe University welcomes the opportunity to work with Infrastructure Victoria in the further development of the Sports Park, and its integration as an exemplar project within the proposed sports planning frameworks.

6. Improve accessibility for people with mobility challenges

People with disabilities face many challenges to full participation in social and economic life in Victoria. La Trobe University supports expedited investment in accessible infrastructure that enhances the participation of people with disabilities, and feels there is scope to significantly increase the maturity and breadth of options under consideration. The La Tobe University Living with Disability Research Centre is focused on building the evidence base to support inclusion, and would be a useful reference point for Infrastructure Victoria in improving accessibility for people with mobility challenges.

9. Provide access to high-quality education infrastructure to support lifelong learning

La Trobe University supports government initiatives for Victoria to be known as the Education State. This vision will require additional investment in schools, TAFE, and University infrastructure. If improved education outcomes are to flow through into social and economic development, there will be an increasing need to recognise interactions between skills, innovation and industry.

La Trobe University feels that linkages between higher education skills, research, innovation and jobs are under-recognised. Whilst interactions between education and medical research precincts are recognised, La Trobe feels that that there is scope to refine this option and reassess its impact. There is more to university–industry engagement than just the medical sector, and the impact of university and industry engagement is felt well beyond the need for access to education infrastructure.

At La Trobe University, for example, AgriBio houses hundreds of University and Agriculture Victoria staff focussed on supporting and protecting Victoria’s A$11.8 billion agricultural sector through cutting-edge research to improve productivity, fight disease and reduce environmental impact. Assessing infrastructure investment in projects like AgriBio within the prism of demand for education infrastructure understates the importance of this investment in the broader economy.

Victoria’s Industry Sector Strategies focus investment and policy design on industry sectors with high growth potential. These strategies should be more clearly referenced within ‘All Things Considered’, with particular emphasis on their interdependencies with the education sector. The Sector Strategy for Medical Technologies and Pharmaceutical Sector, for example, is aligned with the proposed option of education and medical research precincts. AgriBio is aligned well with the Food and Fibre strategy.
The International Education strategy recognises this sector as Victoria’s largest export industry, and there is scope for Infrastructure Victoria to explicitly consider the implications of this industry for long term infrastructure planning.

La Trobe recommends that consideration be given to establishing a planning framework for focussing strategic investment in research and development and innovation infrastructure in recognition of the role that university and industry engagement can play in progressing economic development. Under new Commonwealth funding arrangements, every dollar of State investment in research is rewarded through research block grant funding. It is important that this opportunity is integrated into Victoria’s infrastructure planning frameworks.

10. Meet growing demand for access to economic activity in central Melbourne

11. Improve access to middle and outer metropolitan major employment centres

La Trobe University supports infrastructure investment consistent with growing demand for access to economic activity in central Melbourne. Better transport and connectivity to the city will have spill over benefits to the broader Melbourne transport network. La Trobe recommends, however, that due consideration be given to sentiment in Plan Melbourne for progress towards a polycentric city. The La Trobe National Employment Cluster is recognised as a site for further investment within Plan Melbourne, with its long term development potential closely associated with a maturation of transport networks beyond central Melbourne. High speed and high frequency transport networks that allow access to central Melbourne are a critical infrastructure need for Victoria, but should also be integrated with suitable high capacity and frequency radial networks that support access to and between distributed employment clusters. Regular shuttle bus services between the Melbourne (Bundoora) Campus and both Macleod and Reservoir Railway Stations are essential for reducing transit time, with a corresponding reduction in private motor vehicle usage and car parking infrastructure.

12. Improve access to jobs and services for people in regional and rural areas

Higher skills and innovation capabilities are a critical factor in supporting jobs and services in regional and rural areas. Regional communities have around half the proportion of people with a higher education qualification or studying for a higher education qualification, compared with metropolitan areas. Low skilled jobs in agriculture and manufacturing are fast disappearing, and there is a pressing need to retrain displaced workers for the jobs of the future. Regional cities are growing fast, and there is increasing demand for high skilled professionals. La Trobe recommends the following investment be made for supporting growth in jobs for regional and rural areas:

- Bring prestige teaching and research to the regions to attract and retain high achieving staff and students, meet workforce needs and transform the regional economy.

- The establishment of the Murray Darling Medical School would bring prestige to the regions and have a transformative effect on regional health systems.
- Targeted investment in research infrastructure would support innovation across the regions. This could include State investment in the Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre. The establishment of a Tertiary Education Policy Research Centre could serve as a mechanism for focussing research investment for greatest impact.

- Targeted investment in TAFE–University partnerships will support the retraining and upskilling of displaced workers. La Trobe University notes that with Deakin’s signalled withdrawal from Warrnambool, only La Trobe and Federation University have a sustained, broad-scale commitment to higher education delivery in regional Victoria.

- Strategic investment in flagship agriculture and agribusiness programs.