Victoria’s Draft 30 year Infrastructure Strategy
Comments and feedback

Prepared by
COTA Victoria Policy Council

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COTA Victoria acknowledges the work of the following groups, used as sources in developing this submission:

Housing for the Aged Action Group: Homes for Life: Towards an older person’s housing strategy and submission to Infrastructure Victoria’s 30 year strategy

VC OSS: Infrastructure Victoria community consultation
COTA Victoria is the primary organisation representing the interests of older Victorians. We are a not-for-profit organisation which has been advocating for the rights of older people for 65 years.

Our mission is to resource, mobilise and advocate for older people to create an age-friendly Victoria.

Our key areas of interest include ageism, poverty and gender as they impact on:
- Health care for older people
- Ageism and age discrimination
- Employment for older people
- Social inclusion
- Safeguarding the rights, dignity and independence of older people
- Elder abuse
- Appropriate and affordable housing
- Access to adequate income security
- Aged care
- Age-friendly communities

Older Victorians give their feedback

Each year COTA Victoria conducts a survey on issues of most concern to older people to guide our policy and program work.

Our 2016 survey nominated access to affordable housing as the greatest concern for older people (44.25% of respondents). This concern was followed by:
- Encouraging employment and training opportunities for older people (42.48%).
- More action on climate change and the environment (41.59%)
- Palliative Care and end of life support (39.82%)
- Public Transport 38.05%

When asked to choose one priority, respondents identified affordable housing as the most important issue.

COTA is currently undertaking a statewide survey of people over the age of 50 focusing on how they find the information they need and how they get around in their community to access services. The results of this survey will provide valuable information for government at the local and state level in the provision of services and initiatives.

Scope of draft strategy for comment

As an advocacy organisation we welcome the opportunity to comment on Victoria’s Draft 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy. Preparation for population change needs more emphasis on the ageing of the population and the changes required across all areas of infrastructure, transport and housing to meet the World Health Organisations’ benchmarks for healthy ageing.

We recommend the Age Friendly Communities Framework to guide creating inclusive and shared urban spaces. Age-friendly cities and communities create enabling environments for active ageing and ageing in place. Planning also needs to be responsive to local needs.
particularly in rural and regional communities. COTA also believes the concept of productivity needs to include volunteering and caring in our communities.

We commend the vision, objectives and community engagement process Infrastructure Victoria has demonstrated. We also look forward to further opportunities to comment on the ongoing development and vision for Victoria.

Our comments in this submission relate to a number of proposed options outlined in the draft 30 year strategy. Due to the tight timeframe for consideration and comment, our comments are mostly focused on the following Needs:

**Need 2 – Address infrastructure challenges in areas with low or negative population growth**

**Need 3 - Respond to increasing pressures on health infrastructure, particularly due to ageing**

**Need 4 – Enable Physical activity and participation**

**Need 7 – Provide better access to housing for the most vulnerable Victorians**

We have also made general comments on transport where this intersects with access and mobility, ageing in place, employment, education and training services and programs.

**Ageing Population Context**

People over 65 are the fastest growing age group in Australia. Many parts of Victoria have more residents over 65 years of age than children under 15 years. Victorians 60 years of age or older is projected to grow to 24.1 per cent by 2031, representing an annual average growth rate of 2.75 per cent – almost double the rate of overall population growth. In 2011, 18 per cent of Victorians living in the Greater Melbourne area were 60 years of age or older, compared with at least 23.5 per cent in regional Victoria. In 2031, these ratios will increase to 22.4 per cent in the Greater Melbourne area and 29.6 per cent in regional Victoria. All areas of infrastructure planning, community development and service delivery (from Commonwealth to local government level) requires an ageing lens to meet the challenges of this dramatic evolutionary shift.

COTA’s work in creating *Age Friendly Communities* (is guided by the principle of active ageing, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). The *WHO’s Global Age Friendly Cities and Communities Guide* provides us with an established framework to guide this. Age Friendly Communities deliver outcomes ranging from physical (addressing transport barriers for instance) to social environments (robust discrimination legislation.)

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2. Ibid
Need 2: Address infrastructure challenges in areas with low or negative population growth

General comment

Population ageing is more pronounced in regional Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne. In 2011, 18 per cent of Victorians living in the Greater Melbourne area were 60 years of age or older, compared with at least 23.5 per cent in regional Victoria. In 2031, these ratios will increase to 22.4 per cent in the Greater Melbourne area and 29.6 per cent in regional Victoria. As an ageing population and as a community we have an obligation to provide reliable efficient and effective mobility across all forms of transport. We are well aware of the health cost of NOT improving transport access to health services in regional/rural communities.

Access to public transport in rural areas is a factor in healthy ageing. Older people living in rural areas constitute one of the highest risk groups of social isolation due to transport disadvantage and reduced access to services. There are links between educational outcomes, lower incomes and poorer health outcomes. What is important to note is that access to services is worse in those areas of highest need – most often remote and rural communities.

For ageing populations in rural areas an inability to drive can directly impact on health and wellbeing outcomes.

Need 3: Respond to increasing pressures on health infrastructure, particularly due to ageing

We are aware of the current work being undertaken on the Statewide System Design, Service and Infrastructure Plan for Health. In considering the ageing population, particularly in some rural areas where the population as a whole is declining, innovative approaches will be needed to ensure that the highest quality services are provided in the setting most appropriate for older Victorians. The cost to local services providing specialised services linked to specialised centres and the cost of travel and accommodation to older people needs to be carefully balanced. Planning such services needs to be done in consultation with individual communities to achieve a balance of costs, quality and outcomes. We strongly endorse greater consideration of the interface between public services, particularly hospital services and primary health care.

In considering the health needs of older Victorians we commend The World Report on Ageing and Health recently published by the World Health Organisation. This report outlines a framework for action to foster Healthy Ageing built around the new concept of functional ability. Making these investments will have valuable social and economic returns, both in terms of health and wellbeing of older people and in enabling their on-going participation in

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5 COTA Victoria’s submission on the Statewide System Design, Service and Infrastructure Plan for Health, September 2016
society. This approach will require fundamental shifts, not just in the things we do, but in how we think about ageing itself. Fundamental shifts in planning are a first step.

3.1.1 Health care ICT systems – COTA recognises the challenges of developing an overall statewide plan for health ICT. Given the history of projects in standardising e-health platforms, planning requires a balance between centralised data and some degree of freedom for individual hospitals and health units with particular attention to local planning and engagement.

The draft strategy could increase its focus on preventive health measures to reduce the demand for hospitals and more intensive health services. Strengthening community health is particularly useful at reaching people in rural areas vs reliance on ICT.

Need 6: Improve accessibility for people with mobility challenges

COTA acknowledges the role technology can play in addressing some of the barriers to accessing services and information. We commend the draft strategy for qualifying its support as it identifies the risks of exacerbating social isolation and barriers to participation.

As the Commissioner for Older Victorians outlined:

Two of the building blocks for addressing social isolation and loneliness are:

- Personal mobility and local transport issues by building on existing networks to facilitate seniors’ access to services and involvement in local activities.
- Access to Information and Community Education.

Issues in the looking to ICT solutions:

- Rural areas have the least digitally connected populations
- Improving public transport can be one of the most cost effective ways to achieve public health objectives
- Many physically and economically disadvantaged people also depend on public transport to access medical services and obtain healthy, affordable food
- Transport services in rural, less populated areas should be measured against a higher health value to provide a basic or ‘adequate’ level of service for people who are ageing, non-drivers, economically disadvantaged and people with disabilities.
- The cost of transport disadvantage in specific geographical locations such as outer-urban fringe, rural and remote Australia needs further research. Whilst there is some research on the relationship between disadvantage, transport and social exclusion in Australia, this is still emerging.  

7 The relationship between transport and disadvantage in Australia, Rosier K, McDonald M, CAFCA Resource Sheet— August 2011
Need 7: Provide better access to housing for the most vulnerable Victorians

COTA supports a number of the affordable housing recommendations made in the Draft Strategy. This includes:

- Affordable housing inclusionary controls
- Residential Tenancies reform
- Affordable housing infrastructure plan
- Social housing stock expansion
- Affordable housing sector planning system amendment.

We urge the development of an affordable housing infrastructure plan that also addresses the specific needs of an ageing population. In particular we urge a coherent Older Persons Housing strategy that integrates housing, supported housing and the aged care system to support people to age in place. We believe there is also scope for creating smarter and innovative solutions to affordable housing.

The increasing housing affordability crisis faced by older people has brought a coalition of organisations together in developing a proposed Older Person’s Housing Strategy. The joint report (due to be released on 17th November 2016) outlines key recommendations currently not included in the draft strategy. In particular:

- Expanding the Assistance with Care and Housing Program
- Ensuring minimum access features in the national construction code for all newly built and extensively modified housing. This should include universal design access.

The following comments reflect our strong endorsement for Housing for the Aged Action Groups’ (HAAG) submission on key recommendations:

**Affordable housing sector planning system amendment:** We support the incentive to fast track affordable housing developments and urge the inclusion of universal housing design standards, to build in flexible and adaptable housing stock.

**Affordable housing planning mechanisms:** COTA believes this needs to go further than voluntary incentives. Inclusionary zoning should require (or mandate) a larger percentage of developments for affordable units/housing and address ways of maintaining affordably priced stock. In return the option of a density bonus could be considered if universal housing design standards were implemented to support ageing in place and access for people with disabilities.

**Social housing stock transfer model:** COTA endorse HAAG’s concern over transferring social housing tenants to private stock as a viable housing pathway. We support strengthening secure and affordable housing stock to ensure those that are most vulnerable are supported into long term secure housing.

**Public Housing asset rationalisation and refurbishment:** COTA also urges the adoption of universal housing design in any refurbishment of public housing. HAAG have developed

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8 Housing for the Aged Action Group, COTA Victoria, Fair Go for Pensioners, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Seniors Rights Victoria, Elders Rights Advocacy, Australian Network for Universal Design and Wintringham. The report will be launched on 17th November 2016
housing justice benchmarks to support the view that public or government ownership of public assets should be retained.

_Crisis housing provision expansion:_ Whilst we recognise the need for this recommendation we share HAAG’s qualified support if there are exit options into longer term housing that are appropriate to the needs of older people, particularly those escaping elder abuse.

Broader housing policy, legislative and financial frameworks for affordable housing supply also need to be considered.

**Need 9: Provide access to high-quality education infrastructure to support lifelong learning**

COTA endorses a number of concerns raised by VCOSS members at its recent community consultation on Friday 21st October, including the following:

Community education providers such as Neighbourhood houses, U3A, libraries and VCAL support lifelong learning for people across the life course, from young people to older people. These community education providers play an important education/training pathway particularly for people who may not have had success or access to more formal education institutions. They can also play an important role in strengthening their communities and breaking down social isolation. Whilst the draft strategy highlights the use of TAFE facilities, there is no mention of accessing and utilising University facilities.

**Transport comments and options**

**Transport Pricing**

COTA supports the principle of pricing mechanisms to reduce congestion in the CBD. The following concerns have been raised:

- It would discriminate against lower income groups and visitors from regional and rural Victoria where access to medical appointments required driving; Accessibility issues would have to be addressed.
- There should be free or lower cost entry for off-peak periods encouraging drivers to avoid peak periods if possible.
- Regional and rural visitors need to have affordable travel in Melbourne to avoid exacerbating their existing disadvantages in time and cost.

**Transport Design**

It is necessary to aim higher than compliance with the current Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Universal design and access (rather than just providing ramps and other ‘add-ons’ for compliance), is required to address the mobility needs of people with disabilities and older people with mobility needs.

COTA recommends that public transport purchase by PTV and other service providers should meet DDA and Universal Access requirements. Investment in transport infrastructure is needed in the following areas:
• Railway station platforms and adjacent rails need to be refurbished and maintained so that standards are compliant and accessible for everyone including wheel-chair users and older people who have lower levels of mobility.
• Many more fully accessible tram stops are needed so that all tram users have safe and easy access, significant investment is required for this and should not be overshadowed by the emphasis of primarily investing in new trams.
• There is a dire need for more fully accessible buses, especially in areas where there are no alternatives, such as in many regional and rural communities.
• PTV is to be commended for seeking transport user input on design, however there needs to be more consultation with diverse user groups.

General comments Transport Infrastructure solutions and best practice

Accessible and improved Public Transport information can be improved by:
• Improved way-finding, times and other information at stations and stops;
• Co-designed digital information to make it more user friendly for older people, the elderly and all commuters;
• More investment is needed in healthy and sustainable transport including:
  o Improvement in pedestrian access to transport hubs and stops;
  o Increased investment in bike and shared paths.
• Improved training of service providers to ensure drivers and other service providers understand the needs of frail older persons and people with disability.
• Subsidies for alternative transport options, such as taxis or community transport:
  o where transport options are limited, as in many rural and regional areas;
  o for medical needs, where it is not feasible to take other public transport.


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