Attention: Mr Jim Miller  
Chair  
Infrastructure Victoria  
BY EMAIL: enquiries@infrastructurevictoria.com.au  

31 October 2016  

Dear Mr Miller  

Submission on Victoria’s Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy  

Please find attached our submission to Victoria’s Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy. I am CEO of a Joint Venture vehicle “EPICentre Victoria” and write to you on behalf of the consortium to have our innovative major infrastructure initiative included in consideration of your wide brief to develop the 30 year strategy for infrastructure in our great State.  

We have been involved in the development of our project for one year and it will be a number of years before the project is realised and finally brought into existence.  

Our submission accurately reflects relevant and important accord with a number of the needs and recommendations identified and made in the Draft Strategy.  

We commend Infrastructure Victoria on its Draft 30 Year Strategy and look forward to the consideration of our contributions to the 30 Year Strategy once finalised later in 2016.  

Yours faithfully  

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Victoria’s Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy  
Submission by EPICentre Victoria  
October 2016
EPICentre Victoria

Victoria’s Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy

Submission by EPICentre Victoria

October 2016

A submission to promote the design, construction and operation of a cluster of major infrastructure projects including:

“The Melbourne PIN” - A world class tourism experience
The State Planning Centre - An internationally recognised State planning facility and
The Melbourne Imaginarium - A world first creative space for kids 3 to 103

Federation Square/Birrarung Marr Precinct, Melbourne, Victoria

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BACKGROUND

EPICentre has recognised that Melbourne and Victoria have long lacked an essential piece of Tourism and Cultural Infrastructure to rival the Sydney Opera House or The Sydney Harbour Bridgeclimb. It has examined and researched international precedent attractions in concert with an examination of key central Melbourne locations and infrastructure. Of particular emphasis has been the identification of underutilised CBD land which could be repurposed to feature a signature mixed use cluster of high value, high visitation tourism and cultural centres.

THE 30 YEAR DRAFT INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

EPICentre Victoria recognises the need to strategically plan for a positive future both for Melbourne and Victoria. We thank Infrastructure Victoria for the opportunity to make a contribution to this advance planning for the future.

We note that Infrastructure Victoria’s positioning in the Draft Strategy includes: “Melbourne has just been named the most liveable city in the world for the sixth consecutive year ....and “ The success of our state ... is no accident. Careful planning, bold decisions and significant investment over several decades have shaped the Victoria we know today. This success is not perpetual and it cannot be taken for granted. Without continual planning for a better future, the state we all appreciate and expect will become a very different place.”

And further that “Infrastructure is all about facilitating good outcomes for people. It connects people to jobs, to education, to services, to each other. It supports Victoria’s businesses, industries and communities. It creates opportunities and success. Good infrastructure is at the heart of a great state, and good infrastructure doesn’t happen without good planning.”

We support the strategic vision, and guiding principles in Victoria’s Draft 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy.

We support the objectives of the strategy and a number of the needs of the strategy.
With particular regard to EPICentre Victoria, the needs that appear to relate to our principal interest include:

- 1: Address infrastructure challenges in areas with high population growth

   *Melbourne and Victoria’s population growth is understood to be on an inevitable and significant upward trajectory.*

   *Tourism numbers from both domestic and international sources are also expected to experience significant growth, which will result in an increased demand for quality tourism and cultural experiences.*

- 5: Provide spaces where communities can come together

   *World class experiences and events are a core part of Melbourne’s and Victoria’s tourism and cultural offerings. A need to keep pace with international developments and standards is at the centre of appropriate CBD planning in this sector.*

**Our response to Need 1 - Address infrastructure challenges in areas with high population growth**

Our proposal for the design and development of EPICentre Victoria in the Federation Square/Birrarung Marr precinct in Central Melbourne, is conceived, designed and planned to be developed by EPICentre Victoria, a wholly owned Victorian entreprise, the principals of which are:

Dylan Brady of Decibel Architecture; and

Damian Crock of The Crock Group.

EPICentre Victoria combines global experience in architectural design and realisation of major projects with expertise in the management of world class tourism experiences, multi stakeholder major special event design and production nationally and globally, and provision of legal services for national and international corporations.
Inspired by a shared love of home City and State, EPICentre Victoria will become a nationally and internationally recognised beacon for Melbourne, “The Melbourne PIN’ becoming the spot from which distances are measured to and from the world’s most liveable city.

VICTORIAN STATE GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC AND POLICY POSITIONING

EPICentre Victoria has closely considered the State Government of Victoria’s prospective involvement in this innovative project by reference to its policy settings and strategic direction.

We understand that “in order to ensure that Victorians continue to enjoy a high quality of life, the Government is expanding its capital planning horizon to the next decade. Sensible use of public debt will ensure the right investments are made in productivity enhancing infrastructure to service the State’s growing population. In maintaining net debt at around 6 per cent of GSP, the Government is unlocking future capacity for capital investment and positioning Victoria to maintain its economic momentum into the future.”1
We see EPICentre Victoria’s constituent project elements as properly being characterised as “productivity enhancing infrastructure” through the provision of both significant development and construction phase and ongoing operational phase full and part-time employment for many Victorians. They will service not only the State’s growing population, but also prove to be valuable tourism and cultural assets to service the visitor to State population which is expected to increase year on year by approximately 3.5% domestically and 5.6% internationally over the coming decade.  

Central to quality of life in the future will be the promotion of experiences, both real and virtual, combined with inspiration of children and adults to add to the innovation required nationally to keep Victoria and Australia at world’s best practice status.

We note that “macroeconomic conditions continue to benefit the Victorian economy, with the lower Australian dollar delivering a more competitive edge for our exporters.” It also provides an ideal time in the State’s history to import (more affordably than would recently have been possible) a world leading piece of tourism infrastructure from the United Kingdom, given the effect on the British currency of the recent Brexit. “With interest rates remaining at historic lows, Victorian business confidence has risen and investment is strong. Service industries and the knowledge economy will assume greater importance over the coming years. Victoria will enjoy a significant competitive advantage in these areas, and as the national economy rebalances the State will increasingly be seen as an attractive destination for private investment.”

The EPICentre Victoria elements of the State Planning Centre and The Melbourne Imaginarium will be outstanding examples of addition to the knowledge economy, combined with the proven value of their contribution to the visitor economy, particularly when paired with the appeal of The Melbourne PIN as mixed purpose visitor attractors.

1. Victorian State Budget 2016/7
3. Victorian State Budget 2016/7
4. Victorian State Budget 2016/7
We also consider our proposal to be closely aligned to Victorian Tourism Industry Council recommendations made in its Victorian Budget 2016/7 submission including but not limited to:

Recommendation 15 - Stimulate public and private sector investment and recognise genuine industry partnerships to fast track product development through appropriate and supportive policies by all levels of government.

Benefits • Providing visitors with new reasons to visit, activities to participate in and goods and services to purchase will increase visitor numbers and expenditure and facilitate repeat visitation. Leveraging private sector investment with government seed funding and paving the way for appropriate development of new and refreshed attractions will position the State as an innovative and responsive destination.

Our proposal also addresses:
Headwinds to growth • Need to renew our infrastructure - historically European tourists were attracted to Victoria by our natural scenery historical attractions. While these drawcards remain, new volumes of tourists from Asia also seek high-end experiences and entertainment. Unfortunately though, some of Victoria’s tourism infrastructure hasn’t always kept pace with this changing demand and is in need of upgrades to refresh the visitor experience.  

In its selection of the final tower system, EPICentre Victoria proposes to mitigate design, construction and operational project risk by the inclusion in its scheme of proven technology, in the knowledge that the appeal of innovative new visitor experiences is guaranteed.

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5 Victorian Tourism Industry Council – Victorian Budget 2016/7 Submission
Our proposal is in accord with the following recommendation in the Draft Strategy:

“1.4 Make better use of local infrastructure in areas experiencing growth.

1.4.1 Public space utilisation. Activate and open up state government land and facilities for wider community use by undertaking an audit to identify underutilised assets, initially in areas of high growth, and reviewing and removing regulatory barriers to their use within 0-5 years. The findings of the audit should be published to show where opportunities for better use of government assets exist currently and where they are likely to be in future (ref. CSU).”

We have identified a number of locations in the Melbourne CBD which comprise State owned or controlled land which is underutilised. The repurposing of a modest footprint of this land will provide benefits across the private and government sectors and help secure Victoria’s world leading position for liveability. With comprehensive cooperation of EPICentre and State Government accommodation with planning and other controls, maximum benefit will be assured.

Our Response to Need 5 - Provide spaces where communities can come together

We recognise that “public spaces, and the community connections they enable are central to social cohesion. These spaces include community centres, arts and culture venues, recreation facilities and parks.” We know that “as Victoria’s population grows, access to public spaces is likely to come under pressure.” Our proposal maximises value and return on a modest CBD footprint. Our new public space will be accessible to all, the hallmark of success for a public space.

We are proposing a vibrant place, to foster creativeness and support tourism.

Our proposal meets a number of the recommendations made in the Draft Strategy in this regard

We are determined to address and respond to the importance of infrastructure in supporting social connections. Our proposal which is planned to be a public private partnership will dovetail with the recommendation that “government make more strategic and evidence-based investment decisions in facilities, getting the most out of existing and new assets, and rationalising old assets that are not going to meet future community needs.”

EPICentre Victoria responds to the recommendation that, “with increasingly high costs of land, construction and maintenance and changing population profiles, more shared and less single use spaces will be required in the future. Sometimes, the complexity of joint planning and managing spaces makes it seem easier for all parties to just go it alone. However, investing in community spaces that meet the needs of just one group is unlikely to be viable in future.”
We have recognised and endorse the view that “ultimately, partnerships are required to deliver the shared spaces Victoria needs.”

We assert that EPICentre Victoria is a worthy example of infrastructure that fits with recommendations including:

5.1 Make more strategic investments in cultural and sporting facilities.

5.2 Better use existing public spaces.

5.2.1 Public space utilisation. Activate and open up state government land and facilities for wider community use by undertaking an audit to identify underutilised assets, initially in areas of high growth, and reviewing and removing regulatory barriers to their use within 0-5 years. The findings of the audit should be published to show where opportunities for better use of government assets exist currently and where they are likely to be in the future (ref. CSU).

5.2.2 Community space shared use agreements. Better support the sharing of state facilities by local government, service providers and community organisations by standardising shared use agreements and providing supporting tools and resources within 0-5 years. As a first step, there should be a review of the effectiveness of existing agreements and barriers to their use (ref. CSS1).

5.4 Upgrade existing facilities and build new ones that meet the needs of more than just one group, and respond to the changing needs of the community.

5.4.2 Community space refurb/rationalisation. Create an incentive fund with clear criteria to assist local government, service providers and community organisations to refurbish or rationalise community assets (such as kindergartens, sports facilities and parks) over 0-30 years to better meet the needs of the community, while ensuring financial sustainability. We expect a reasonable level of funding would be required as an incentive, with local governments and other organisations placing bids to government on the basis of demonstrating a significant gap, refurbishment requirements, resource constraints and efforts to divest surplus or ineffective assets (ref. CSR).

Funding recommendations

The delivery of the following major projects is expected to involve significant costs. If government chooses to adopt this recommendation, a range of funding mechanisms should be considered.
Funding recommendations – additional comments

For community space refurb/rationalisation, we recommend establishing an incentive fund to assist local government, service providers and community organisations to refurbish or rationalise community assets. Some of the cost of providing refurbished or new community facilities could be reduced by local government, service providers and community organisations selling low-performing, costly or not fit-for-purpose community infrastructure. Property development opportunities could also be pursued by partnering with the private sector, such as selling or leasing facilities or floor space for commercial retail development (such as cafés, shops, etc.). User charges could be used to recover from users some of the cost of the infrastructure, maintenance or operations for these facilities. User charges for using refurbished community facilities could be considered to help fund future development.
VICTORIAN POPULATION GROWTH AND INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

It is noted that “Victoria’s population growth leads the nation. Forecasts suggest Melbourne could overtake Sydney as Australia’s most populous city in 2030. This means that smart choices need to be made in order to invest in the fundamental drivers of long-term growth. Victoria’s growing population will place greater pressure on our services and infrastructure….. and it is noted further that “in order to build on the positive trends in the Victorian economy, the Government is committing significant funding in the 2016-17 Budget to ensure Victoria’s economy remains strong. Investing in jobs, services and vital infrastructure will lead to sustained and enduring growth for the Victorian economy.”

EPICentre Victoria is essentially such a piece of vital infrastructure and particularly “an essential piece of Victorian Tourism Infrastructure”

As the local, national and international population grows, and with them the domestic and international visitation numbers to Melbourne, it is critical that Melbourne and Victoria remain at the leading edge of visitor experiences, given the importance of the tourism and services sectors to the economy.

6. Victorian State Budget 2016/7
7. Sir Rod Eddington AO, Chair Visit Victoria October 2016
8. Tourism Performance Snapshot – Victorian DEDJTR June 2016
VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

EPICentre Victoria can demonstrate it is aligned with immediate Government priorities as it sits within the fast growth sectors of construction technology and tourism. The Melbourne PIN itself is world leading construction technology and will be equal to the world’s tallest thinnest structure, which presents engineering challenges of the highest order. The design of The State Planning Hall and Melbourne Imaginarium will deploy world leading construction technology.

The entire development will better connect Melbourne not only to regional centres via its innate tourism activity and City/State promotion, but also nationally and internationally.

It will assist the Government in outcomes that create jobs, improve productivity and maintain Victoria’s liveability.

EPICentre Victoria commends this submission to Infrastructure Victoria and welcomes any contact for further information or clarification.

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31 October 2016