11 March 2016

Infrastructure Victoria
enquiries@infrastructurevictoria.com.au

Via email

Dear Sir / Madam

Laying the Foundations

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your report “Laying the Foundations”. Horsham Rural City Council considers the development of a state-wide framework for infrastructure investment to be critical in ensuring that the limited funds available are used efficiently and effectively, and welcomes the establishment of Infrastructure Victoria to facilitate this outcome.

Council has a number of general comments that are presented in the balance of this letter, and some specific comments on some of the objectives/needs identified in the Report, which are included as an attachment to this letter.

Providing infrastructure for growing communities is clearly necessary. It also needs to be recognised that all communities have infrastructure needs. Communities which are not growing in population or declining in population, such as in many rural areas, are also entitled to modern standards of infrastructure as much as growth areas. The only difference that should be considered is the scale and quantity of infrastructure that needs to be provided in rural areas – not the quality.

There is limited reference to rural areas in ‘Laying the Foundations’, notably a reference to the water grid is included. The importance of the water grid is agreed with. Rural and regional areas have broader infrastructure needs, including in transport, health, education and communications. As identified earlier, these should be to modern standards, as is the case in growth areas. For example, schools in regional and rural areas equally need to be developed to the appropriate standard so that modern teaching methods can be applied in all of our schools.

Connectivity between regional communities is vital. High quality roads and public transport connections allow portability of labour and rural communities to access medical and other critical social services that are often not available locally in these areas.

Communications connectivity via mobile phone coverage and NBN internet is especially important in rural areas, in particular given that the current communication service is often limited in some of these areas. The high reliance of data for modern agriculture is perhaps
not widely recognised. The enclosed report ‘Data in Agriculture’ by the Wimmera Development Association demonstrates the important productivity outcomes achievable with effective data connectivity.

Please also find Council’s specific comments enclosed.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

John Martin
Director Technical Services
Laying the Foundations – Detailed Comments

Council’s comments on the summary objectives / needs are presented in this attachment.

The structure of the Infrastructure Victoria (IV) report, Laying the Foundations objectives / needs is repeated here, although in some cases there are no additional comments provided by Council on the issues.

1. **Respond to population growth and change**
   
   **A. Address infrastructure deficits in high-growth areas**

   **Comment:** The problem of renewal of aging infrastructure in established areas also needs to be recognised.


   The need to support infrastructure deficits in high-growth areas is supported. But there is also a significant need to determine appropriate funding models and renewal strategies for this significant infrastructure need.

   This need is in part recognised in the IV report, on p42, where it states “In contrast, many local councils report a backlog of maintenance for civic assets in their annual reporting.”

   **B. Manage increasing demands on health infrastructure**

   **Comment:** These demands include the ability to access modern health systems for patients living in regional and rural areas

   The IV report identifies the trends for people to “age in place” (p38), and for a rise in the number of people over 65. It is agreed that Victoria’s health infrastructure needs to respond to demands from these and other factors. The IV report highlights the connection between various themes – in this case, there is a link between improving health infrastructure and public transport services for people in rural areas to access specialist health services, which may be in regional centres, such as Ballarat and Bendigo, or in Melbourne.

   **C. Provide access to high-quality school facilities**

2. **Support healthy, safe and vibrant communities**

   **A. Enable physical activity through infrastructure and urban design**

   **Comment:** This should include the development of systems that are adapted to climate change

   The IV report, on p42, identifies the need for cycling paths, sporting facilities and open spaces for walking and exercise. This is agreed with. Climate change is likely to lead to higher temperatures, making the provision of shade for daytime recreation activities, and lighting to facilitate participation in these activities at night.

   **B. Provide good public spaces where communities can come together**
Comment: The importance of water in enhancing the liveability of rural and regional areas should also be recognised.

Page 42 of the IV report identifies the importance of public spaces for fostering social cohesion, and other reasons. This is agreed with. In the dry Wimmera-Mallee, where there are few permanent open water features, the community has a strong attachment to those water features that are fortunate enough to receive a regular water supply. In periods of drought, which may be more common under climate change, these features are more frequently dry. A later section of the IV report identifies the importance of water security, this is also important to enhance the liveability of drier regions, for the social cohesion reasons identified by IV, and other reasons.

Public spaces also need to be designed to take account of climate change, for example recognising the importance of shade and shelter.

- C. Strengthen access to cultural infrastructure
- D. Maximise positive impacts on amenity and wellbeing from infrastructure

3. Reduce disadvantage
   A. Improve accessibility for people with disabilities and/or mobility challenges through infrastructure

Comment: It is agreed that ICT offers an opportunity to provide improved access to some services. However, internet connection speed remains a limitation in many regional areas.

- B. Address housing affordability challenges with better social housing

Comment: This should be done in a manner compatible with established housing in these areas

Social housing is provided in many rural towns. It is important in planning social housing that it is compatible with the adjoining developments to reduce the likelihood of new social housing areas being stigmatised.

- C. Support changing approaches to social service and justice delivery through infrastructure

4. Enable workforce participation
   A. Provide access to the diversity of employment opportunities offered by the central city

Comment: On page 50, the IV report states that “Victoria’s high productivity industries are typically knowledge-intensive sectors”, and then notes that “these industries are particularly concentrated in the central city”.

These industries should also be fostered in regional areas, particularly as improved internet speeds leads to enhance ICT services in these areas.

Similarly, many regional businesses are now competing with international internet-based businesses. Support for these regional businesses to compete in an increasingly ICT-based environment will assist the productivity of these businesses, and enhance regional communities.

Also on page 50, the IV report highlights the need for improved access between Melbourne and the regional centres of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. It is also important to improve access to the outer
A. Improve the efficiency of freight supply chains through infrastructure

Comment: This should include:
- Supporting existing and new intermodal facilities to improve access to rail
- Enhancing connections to all of Victoria’s ports, including Portland, including for multiple transport modes

The IV report, on page 53, identifies that “as nearly all of this freight is moved on roads, efficiency benefits are expected from the commitment to improved access to the Port of Melbourne.”

Improvements in the efficiency of rail and road networks are needed to reduce congestion within Melbourne, and particularly for access to ports. Improved rail connections at port, and in regional areas will help provide an incentive to encourage more freight on rail.

Major mineral sands mines are planned for western Victoria. The improvement of the efficiency of the rail freight network will encourage the product from this industry, and others, to utilise rail to a greater extent. This includes connections to the Port of Portland. The announced link of Maryborough to Ararat as part of the Murray Basin Rail project, is an example of improved infrastructure that helps improve competition and efficiency in rail freight movement.

Investigation of a new port location near Melbourne should have a strong technical base, which considers the origin of export product and the impact of the port location on supply chains.

B. Move people to and from airports more efficiently

6. Support Victoria’s changing, globally integrated economy

A. Boost tourism through infrastructure provision

Comment: Enhanced passenger rail to regional tourism areas is an important ingredient of this need.

The description of this need is supported. An important infrastructure to support regional tourism is an improved passenger rail system. Many tourists travel across Europe, North America and Asia using the extensive rail systems in those regions. Improved rail in regional Victoria will have both tourism and business benefits.

B. Enable the growth of a highly skilled, digitally connected workforce through infrastructure
Comment: The need identified in this section is supported. The success of a digitally connected workforce will be impacted on by the capability of internet systems, which are at a lower standard in many regional areas.

7. **Promote sustainable production and consumption**
   A. Improve rural and regional water security

Comment: In addition to the points raised in this section, the social value of water needs to be recognised. See earlier discussion under 2B.
   B. Manage pressures on landfill and waste recovery facilities

8. **Protect and enhance natural environments**
   A. Help preserve natural environments and minimise biodiversity loss through infrastructure
   B. Improve the health of waterways through infrastructure

9. **Support climate change mitigation and adaptation**
   A. Smooth the adjustment to a carbon-constrained world through infrastructure
   B. Adapt infrastructure to changing climate conditions

Comment: This should include for recreation activities to promote health and wellbeing outcomes

Shade and shelter for recreation (see comments under 2A and 2B) including social gathering locations in urban areas will be increasingly important with further impacts of climate change.

10. **Build resilience to shocks**
   A. Improve the resilience of critical infrastructure to disruptive events

Comment: It is agreed that infrastructure needs to be planned / designed to provide resilience. This is likely to impact on the costs of infrastructure.

   B. Address infrastructure-related emergency response challenges

End of comments.