



Northern Councils Alliance

Release of: Northern Region Transport Plan and the
Northern Region Transport Study – Bus Networking



Connecting our community

Transport investment in Melbourne's north

Melbourne's north is experiencing significant population growth through both greenfield development and infill development and densification. Predictions show that the Northern Growth Corridor represents a sizeable proportion of Melbourne's projected growth. By 2036, the regional population is projected to be close to 1.5 million, similar to Adelaide and half a million more than in the region at present.

Melbourne's north hosts large employment centres including La Trobe University and Melbourne Airport and includes the key precincts of Broadmeadows, Epping and Cloverton. The road and rail connections link the north to Melbourne's CBD and the Port of Melbourne as well as the rest of metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and the nation.

It is vital that the transport system can support future growth and jobs while safeguarding and improving livelihood, liveability and action on Council climate emergency goals.¹

However, growing pains are evident as the region's population grows at 175% of the national average. Improved connectivity and greater investment in dedicated transport projects are required to manage this growth and realise the opportunities Melbourne's north offers to all of Victoria.

This can be achieved via:

- improved connectivity of the bus network, including a new loop bus route as a first step in supporting the Suburban Rail Loop project
- improved rail connectivity with line duplication and extensions
- improved road connectivity with new road transport corridors.²

Ongoing strategic and coordinated planning is needed to ensure that the broader needs of the community are met with investment in transport infrastructure.

The members of the Northern Councils Alliance are well placed to partner with State and Commonwealth Government colleagues on developing and implementing these critical projects, as insights and connection to communities are leveraged for the benefit of all Victorians.

¹Northern Region Transport Strategy 2020, Stantec – Summary

²Northern Region Transport Study: Bus Networking 2020, Movement and Place – Summary

Issues with connectivity and access

Melbourne's population is surging, which is a key contributor to road congestion and adds to delays in transport connections. This impacts on Melbourne's north disproportionately and increases pressure on public transport systems.

Most residents drive to work, with only 10.9 per cent of households in the north using public transport daily. Adding to the pressure, residents face long commute times. Those without cars have limited access to employment across the region and protracted time spent travelling into the CBD has implications for health and social needs.

Further impacting on the issues facing Melbourne's north is the lack of connectivity between where people live and where people work, including limitations due to the radial nature of Melbourne's current train network. While there are long-standing issues facing the north driven by short-term planning and a reliance on capital projects, there are a number of quick wins that will pragmatically and practically improve transport connection between jobs, health, education and larger transport nodes.

About the region

Melbourne's north is:

- an economic powerhouse, producing over \$40b worth of goods and services, growing by 4.7 per cent per annum
- a robust and growing local economy, with 75,000 local businesses supported by over 360,000 local jobs
- home to over one million residents with annual population growth of 2.8 per cent (compared to the national average of 1.6 per cent).

The region is known for its diverse population:

- 35 per cent of residents speak a second language
- approximately 30 per cent were born overseas in non-English speaking countries
- 40 per cent of the population are under the age of 29
- 67 per cent of the population are of working age.

From bustling inner suburbs right through to new homes under construction in newly established suburbs, the region's urban structure has changed over the last 20 years with the expansion of the growth boundary. This presents challenges in terms of transport, jobs, health infrastructure and liveability.

About the Northern Councils Alliance

The Northern Councils Alliance (NCA) represents Melbourne's northern region, which comprises seven connecting councils. Alongside the *North and West Melbourne City Deal Plan* the NCA has developed the *Northern Region Transport Strategy*, which outlines key challenges, identifies opportunities and provides suggestions for a collaborative approach to solving the region's transport connectivity issues.



Improved bus networking

Melbourne's north is continuing to expand as the region struggles to keep up with population growth and road congestion. Key to fixing the problem is greater public transport and better access to employment hubs. Major employment centres like La Trobe University and Melbourne Airport are critical to Melbourne's economic growth. Alongside expanding Melbourne's bus network and helping people reach critical employment centres, a Suburban Rail Loop Bus will open up east and west travel, easing the strain on the north's transport network and reducing road congestion.

Services to growth areas and improvements to the SmartBus routes will also support increased access across the region.

Suburban Rail Loop Bus

1. Directly connect all rail corridors in Melbourne's north, improving cross-corridor connectivity
2. Create a strong cross-Yarra connection between Melbourne's north and east
3. Build the 'SRL' brand ahead of the rail launch, while increasing public transport patronage
4. Save up to 15,000 vehicle kilometres per day

Better bus connections to Melbourne Airport

1. Create a new service between Craigieburn and Melbourne Airport via Aitken Boulevard
2. Improve service levels on Route 479 to Sunbury
3. Extend Route 482 to Sunbury
4. Extend Route 561 to Melbourne Airport
5. Introduce a direct shuttle from Broadmeadows Station to Melbourne Airport
6. Extend Route 490 to Melbourne Airport via Tullamarine Business Park
7. Run SmartBus 902 to Melbourne Airport and SmartBus 901 to Airport West shopping centre

Better bus connections to La Trobe University

1. Operate Route 301 throughout the year at higher service levels
2. Extend Route 301 to Heidelberg Station
3. Reroute Route 382 to La Trobe University
4. Connect Routes 513G and 343 and reroute them through La Trobe University
5. Establish a new service between La Trobe University and Viewbank and Yallambie
6. Re-align Route 609 and extend it across the Yarra River to La Trobe University
7. Investigate bus priority at the intersection of Waterdale Road and Kingsbury Drive



Improved rail

Rail is essential to mobility in Melbourne and Melbourne's north has struggled to keep up with demand. This is most evident with access to the Northern Hospital. The current train on the Mernda Line ends 10-15 minutes from the hospital, with bus access unreliable and indirect.

Extending the Upfield Line and expanding the Clifton Hill Exchange will enable access to RMIT University and employment hubs while giving greater access to Epping's Northern Hospital and surrounding private health facilities. Upgrading rail lines in Melbourne's north will unlock greater access along the state's metropolitan train lines.

Upfield Line Extension and Duplication

1. Resolve a number of transport issues in the north
2. Address capacity constraints on the Craigieburn Line and provide future capacity for residents in growth areas
3. Enable direct access to RMIT University and employment hubs

Melbourne Metro 2

1. Add capacity to the Mernda, Hurstbridge and Werribee lines, necessary to cater for population growth and use
2. Link the northern suburbs to Fishermans Bend and Newport through to Altona North and Sunshine using existing freight lines, and connect the Werribee and Mernda lines
3. Enable the Lalor to Wollert Rail extension

Expanding Clifton Hill Exchange

1. Help bring capacity to the line, enabling the Wollert Rail extension
2. Support access to the Northern Hospital
3. Link from Lalor train station to the Epping MAC precinct and the rapidly growing communities of Epping North and Wollert, home to almost 95,000 residents by 2040
4. Access to inner north jobs and education and Epping's Northern Hospital, private health, retail and Melbourne Market



Better road connections

Roads are essential in areas where public transport is unavailable or is uncompetitive. Road connection enables businesses to get important goods and is imperative for trade. The Outer Metropolitan Ring Transport Corridor will be a 100-kilometre high-speed transport link for people and freight, connecting key international transport hubs. It currently has committed funds from both State and Commonwealth Governments. This road will also reduce the volume of traffic on the Hume Freeway, a major access point for the region and the state.

Outer Metropolitan Ring Transport Corridor/E6

1. Create better connections to key international transport hubs such as Melbourne Airport, Avalon Airport, the Port of Geelong and the proposed Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal and Western Intermodal Freight Precinct
2. Serve as an important travel and freight route to interstate and regional destinations
3. Link residential and employment growth areas in the north and west of Melbourne