



VLGA Communique #1

Issues for the 2018 State Election and beyond

The VLGA has prepared this briefing for all council CEOs and mayors.

The upcoming November state election presents councils with the opportunity to advocate for the needs of their communities. The VLGA encourages councils to actively explore local issues in the context of this communique and identify their community-specific issues. These issues will be the basis on which local councils develop advocacy plans on behalf of their community and lobby local MPs leading up to the 2018 State Election and beyond.

This briefing provides your council with key points for lobbying and advocacy.

We encourage you to share it with fellow councillors and council staff to assist in effectively advocating/lobbying for the needs of your council.

We also encourage your council to share your lobbying and advocacy efforts with the VLGA so that we may better represent the interests of the sector in 2018 and beyond.

Kathryn Arndt, CEO

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) believes that the state government needs to focus on three key issues facing local Victorian communities in the upcoming November state election.

1. Infrastructure planning
2. Integrated transport

3. Regional development

Informing this view, the VLGA consulted extensively with its council members and listened to and heard from mayors and councillors across Victoria. We also outlined opportunities for the state government to collaborate with the local government sector in 2018 and beyond for the benefit of all Victorians.

1. Infrastructure Planning for Local Communities

A coordinated effort between state and local governments in infrastructure planning is urgently required to meet the demand of local communities. Local communities are experiencing rapid growth and at a different frequency depending on location and pre-existing infrastructure. These can be broadly classified into three categories

1. Interface councils

Rapid population growth with very little or non-existent infrastructure such as public transport, health care facilities or schools. Outer western areas such as Melton and Werribee are expected to have over one million residents by 2035. Urgent investment is required so that councils can adequately plan to cater for growth.

2. Metropolitan councils

Urban councils are experiencing growth along major public transport and infrastructure corridors. Increasing population density in areas such as St Kilda and Box Hill are driving high rise/apartment developments. However, this population increase makes it difficult for residents to access existing public infrastructure. Many inner metropolitan suburbs are also becoming major thoroughfares for residents living in outer suburban locations due to lack of infrastructure in those areas as identified above.

3. Rural and Regional councils

For residents in rural and regional councils, upgrading of existing infrastructure and investment in new infrastructure is needed to retain and attract residents. Many rural councils are experiencing

very low or even net negative population growth due to lack of infrastructure supporting local economic and job opportunities in their communities. This, in turn, is making rural towns unattractive for families and for economic development.

2. Integrated Transport Solutions

An integrated transport network is vital to the Victorian economy. Timely and seamless movement of people and freight increases the liveability of large population centres to stimulate investment in regional and rural cities. Conversely, over-reliance on one mode of transport or lack of integration of various transport options will have detrimental effects on the health and well-being of communities. These are the foundations on which the Transport Integration Act (2010) was established. A concerted whole-of-government approach is required to make integrated transport options a priority for all Victorians, now and into the future.

Key issues to be considered include:

1. Investment in a true network of public transport options: extending bus routes, increasing frequency of bus services and building interconnections between buses, trams and trains.
2. Working with councils and other government agencies to identify and fill gaps: better utilisation of school and community buses, mass transit systems for metropolitan "blackspots" such as airport link, Doncaster rail and public transport options for Elwood.
3. Increasing connectivity between regional centres including continued investment in roads, regional aviation, freight and passenger rail services as well as shuttle service between regional rail lines.

3. Regional Development

Ongoing investment is vital to the economic and social well-being of regional cities and towns.

Decentralisation of government agencies and services is welcomed and supported. However, people will not relocate or remain in regional cities and towns if there is limited supporting infrastructure available, such as health and educational facilities and transport connectivity.

Tourism opportunities in regional cities and towns need to be examined not only to provide education and job opportunities for young people but for wider community benefit across the regions. One such example is the proposed Mornington to Phillip Island ferry, which will not only provide transport options but will create tourism and economic development opportunities along the coastline.

The VLGA would like to see upfront investment by the state government on these issues to ensure the sustained development of regional cities and towns. Pro-active partnerships between the state government, councils and other sectors need to be examined in addressing regional development opportunities. There are 3 areas for immediate action by the state government which will have a

direct benefit to the community through local government as providers and as deliverers of key services.

1. Partner with councils to find innovative solutions to waste management

The current business model of exporting our waste is flawed and not sustainable. Councils would like to explore a range of options in tackling waste, they include:

- Incentives and measures to support councils to work with residents to reduce waste, including reducing recyclable waste from households;
- Fast-track of roll out of organic recycling to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill;
- Increase capacity of local waste management initiatives such as regional waste to energy plants.

Councils cannot do this on their own. However, they are keen to work with the state government in exploring and implementing these options. To do so, the VLGA calls on the state government to use the accumulated fund from the Land Fill Levy to explore and implement sustainable solutions to waste management.

2. Partner with councils to address infrastructure gaps

Councils in the interface regions between metropolitan and regional/rural areas are calling for better access to the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (GAIC). The GAIC has been limited to infrastructure projects of between \$1 and \$10 million. Interface councils believe the \$10 million limit is constraining their ability to tackle large-scale, inter generational infrastructure projects. This \$10 million limit needs to be reviewed and adjusted to suit local circumstances.

3. Partner with councils to address planning mechanism red tape

Councils have experienced inefficiencies in both applying and managing the Development Contribution Plan (DCP). The current DCP process requires councils to have detailed infrastructure and service plans in place, even though significant infrastructure and service planning are often the responsibility of the state government. The guidelines governing the operations of the DCP are also rigid and do not give councils ability to modify or vary the DCP to suit changing circumstances. Likewise, councils are also reporting the lack of flexibility when re-applying for a DCP. Councils are effectively required to start from scratch in a re-application process, and there does not appear to be sufficient consideration given to the work done as part of the existing or previous DCP.

The VLGA believes these above three actions are achievable in 2018 and will demonstrate ongoing goodwill and responsiveness from the state government on issues impacting on local government. Medium to the long-term focus. The Victorian local government sector is cognisant of the need for ongoing collaboration and cooperation with the state government. To this end, the VLGA is committed to working with the state government to explore the following issues in greater depth:

1. How can councils use their cooperative and entrepreneurial powers to address cross-council issues (e.g. pavilions for increasing women's participation in sport, increasing public open space in inner-city councils)?
2. How the state government consults closely with councils in the spirit of the Victorian State Local Government Agreement and under the principles of good governance as outlined in the new Local Government Bill (2018)?
3. How can the VLGA play a more active role, in collaboration with stakeholders, in developing model policies and guidelines as required under the Local Government Bill (2018)?
4. How can elected councillors and mayors have greater input into priorities of Metropolitan and Regional Partnerships? There is a perception among elected representatives that those partnerships are "cherry-picking" priorities, which are not reflective of community needs.
5. How can best practice in local government be showcased and promoted? Councils are often leading the way in innovation and collaboration. Forums for an exchange of ideas and inter and intra-sector collaboration need to be supported.