



Submission  
to the Senate Finance and Public  
Administration References Committee  
inquiry into financial support for state  
and territory infrastructure projects

January 2026

# Contents

Why a place-based approach to infrastructure funding is needed .....	3
About NGAA and Growth Areas .....	5
Specific responses to the inquiry terms of reference .....	7
Local government is integral to effective infrastructure planning, governance and delivery ...	9
Recognise growth areas as nationally significant regions.....	10
Prioritise investment for sustainable urban growth .....	11
Resource growth areas equitably aligned to strategic plans and forecasts.....	13
Other related matters .....	17
National Growth Areas Alliance Member councils .....	18

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise their rich culture and their enduring connection to Country and the role this plays in shaping sustainable communities.

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## Why a place-based approach to infrastructure funding is needed

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate inquiry into financial support for state and territory infrastructure projects.

Growth areas, 29 local government areas (LGAs) located in outer regions of Australia's five largest capital cities, are home to over 5.8 million people nationally, including one in four Australian children. Growth areas councils, which represent only 5% of all Australian LGAs, already grappling with the challenges of rapid population growth, are expected to deliver over 300,000 new dwellings in greenfield developments to meet more than a quarter of the National Housing Accord targets, but without commensurate infrastructure.

Growth area LGAs are not only central to Australia's housing supply, but will determine Australia's future productivity, sustainability and resilience. Yet residents consistently face significant inequities in access to essential infrastructure compared to established suburbs, impacting liveability, social cohesion, health, and opportunity. These spatial inequities experienced in outer metropolitan growth areas compared to established inner and middle ring urban areas are evident in the [Australian Urban Observatory's Liveability Scorecards](#) which show poorer access for communities in growth areas across 9 out of 10 core dimensions of liveability, including access public transport, walkability and access to social infrastructure for health, education, sport and recreational arts and cultural activities.

Infrastructure deficits experienced by communities in growth areas are the direct result of Australia's current infrastructure funding system, which is fragmented, inconsistent, and often poorly coordinated across sectors and tiers of government. The Government's 2023 [independent review of the National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects](#), highlighted the stop-start nature of funding and the lack of a sustained investment horizon. This ad hoc approach leads to inefficiencies and service gaps.

The Infrastructure Australia remit covers large scale 'nationally significant' projects and applies rigorous assessment processes and criteria. However, these processes and criteria do not specifically address the needs of growth areas. Growth area councils need multiple infrastructure projects that individually often fall below the IA threshold. But when considered together and across sectors, the infrastructure investment required in growth areas regions for water, energy, roads, transport, communications and community facilities amount to Australia's largest and most urgent infrastructure project.

**What is required for growth areas is a shift from a narrow focus on sector-specific projects to achieving national priorities through a broader place-based approach to infrastructure investment, aligned with a long-term settlement strategy and informed by local communities.**

An over-reliance on competitive grant funding further exacerbates these issues by prioritising projects based on competition rather than equitable or strategic need. This leaves outer metropolitan growth areas with inadequate infrastructure, as they often lack the resources to compete with more established urban centres. With short-term, inconsistent and insufficient funding, councils cannot fully meet their responsibilities as stewards of the people and businesses who call their areas home.

There are, however, alternative models of integrated, place-based infrastructure funding that can be readily adapted to Australia's context. Our 2024 review of [international best practices in infrastructure funding](#) and governance models, drawing on international examples from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States, and Canada, highlights that **the five key elements for effective national infrastructure funding models are**

- i. **long-term, stable funding frameworks;**
- ii. **embedding sustainability as a core criteria;**
- iii. **genuine collaboration across government levels and sectors;**
- iv. **prioritising place-based, community-driven approaches;**
- v. **robust evaluation and accountability.**

Informed by our research, our submission draws upon deep experience of councils representing Australia's fastest-growing outer metropolitan communities — the places where Australia's future is taking shape.

Our submission therefore recommends that the processes, governance and effectiveness of financial support provided to state and territory governments for infrastructure development must:

- 1) **Elevate the role of local government** in the planning, decision-making and implementation of infrastructure development processes
- 2) **Recognise growth areas as nationally significant metropolitan regions** requiring a long term, place-based investment framework
- 3) **Integrate national urban policy goals into criteria and processes** used by the federal government to assess prioritise and allocate infrastructure in major cities
- 4) **Align infrastructure to planned population growth** that supports state and territory regional planning strategies, incorporating consideration of local government community strategies and plans
- 5) **Prioritise investment in infrastructure that supports equitable social, sustainable, economic and cultural outcomes**
- 6) **Incorporate spatial and social equity measures** into progress, performance and evaluation of federal funding and opportunities.

NGAA presents a positive, practical path forward — recognising that fair, timely, and strategic infrastructure investment is essential for shaping a sustainable and inclusive future for all Australians.

## About NGAA and Growth Areas

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) is the peak body for local governments in Australia's fast-growing outer metropolitan regions. We advocate to State and Federal governments for improved policies and equitable funding for growth area councils, to create resilient, liveable and thriving places and communities.

There are 29 growth area Local Government Areas (LGAS) across Australia's five largest capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. These regions are home to more than 5.8 million residents forming the nation's newest communities. The map showing population size, growth rates and dwelling approvals illustrates

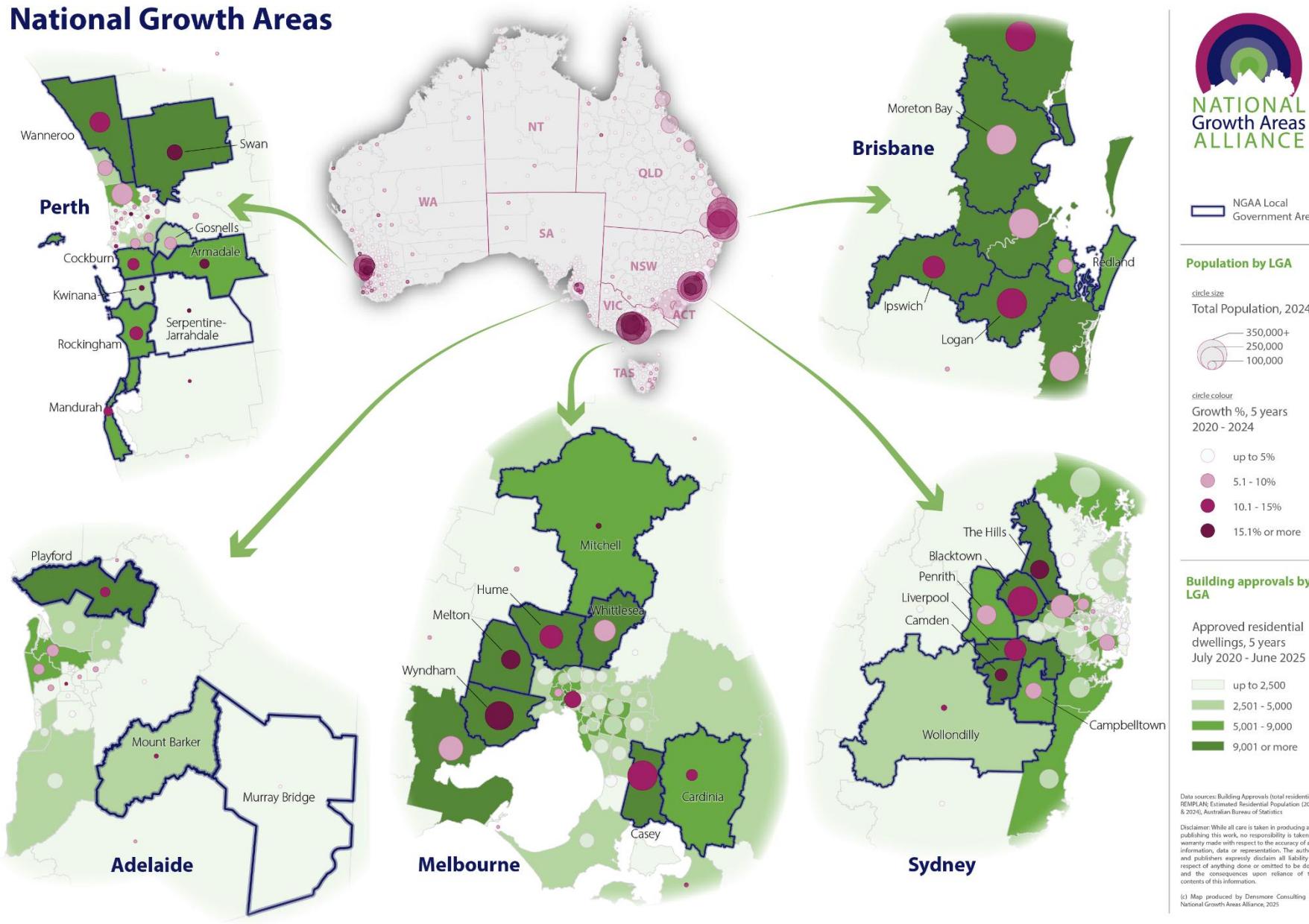
Member councils of the NGAA are united by the shared experiences of grappling with population growth rates at double the national average, significant greenfield urban development and the challenges of long-term under-investment in vital infrastructure.

Representing just 5% of all councils in Australia, growth area councils have been designated through state planning strategies to deliver 26% of the 1.2 million new dwellings under the National Housing Accord by 2029 without commensurate investment in the enabling infrastructure required to service this scale of development and with the strategic transport and social infrastructure to support these newest communities.

The following map illustrates the rate of population growth and dwelling approvals in growth areas compared to other metropolitan LGAs.

# PUBLIC

## National Growth Areas



## Specific responses to the inquiry terms of reference

Our case for a broader, place-based approach to federal financial support for state and territory infrastructure projects goes beyond the terms of reference for this inquiry. However, our recommendations still relate to the inquiry's terms of reference as set out below.

### **1. The criteria and processes used by federal government to assess, prioritise and allocate funding**

NGAA's member councils see daily the consequences of delayed and fragmented infrastructure delivery. Local governments must be involved as planning partners to ensure spatially responsive infrastructure delivery that matches actual growth. Collaborative planning, funding reform, and asset management systems that prioritise growth areas needs to be embedded into the processes used by federal agencies to assess, prioritise and allocate funding.

Recommendation 1: Elevate the role of local government in the planning, decision-making and implementation of infrastructure development processes.

### **2. The transparency, consistency and accountability of federal funding decisions**

Recognising and prioritising growth areas as nationally significant metropolitan regions, with an agreed classification, will help create a consistent approach to assessment and funding allocation across agencies at both Federal and State levels. Adopting a consistent, place-based approach will in turn help ameliorate the existing infrastructure deficits and reduce the likelihood of exacerbating these inequalities.

Recommendation 2: Recognise growth areas as nationally significant metropolitan regions requiring a long term, place-based investment framework and apply an agreed classification across agencies to assessment and funding allocation processes.

### **3. How the viability and appropriateness of state and territory projects receiving federal funding is assessed, including the adequacy of business cases, rural and regional distribution impacts, and use of independent assessments**

NGAA recommends that these plans need to be aligned to national priorities, state and territory and regional planning strategies and informed by local and community planning. Fragmented agency planning disproportionately disadvantages growth communities.

This submission highlights the need for a place-based approach to infrastructure structure funding and for prioritising enabling infrastructure for housing delivery and the disparities in access to strategic transport and social infrastructure that have disadvantaged communities in growth areas and detract from their productivity, liveability, resilience and ultimately social cohesion.

A place-based approach would require consideration of the distribution of infrastructure funding within urban areas and well as rural and regional area. Business cases should be

outcome focussed, rather than sector or problem-centred, and establish how projects help to achieve nationally agreed goals for sustainable growth as set out in the national urban policy.

Recommendation 3: Integrate national urban policy goals into criteria and processes used by the federal government to assess, prioritise and allocate infrastructure in major cities

#### **4. How the economic, social and cultural and community impacts of federally supported infrastructure projects are considered during assessments**

Where infrastructure projects are aligned to national policy priorities and state and territory strategic plans then intended economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes are made explicit and can be used as the basis for assessing the degree to which projects will help achieve those agreed outcomes. Local government undertakes extensive community engagement to develop their community strategies and plans. Local government community strategies and plans should be incorporated into infrastructure assessment processes to ensure community impacts are fully considered.

Recommendation 4: Align infrastructure to planned population growth and settlement patterns identified in state and territory regional planning strategies incorporating consideration of local government community strategies and plans.

#### **5. Federal oversight mechanism used to track progress and performance of a state or territory project receiving federal funding and opportunities to improve governance, oversight and public reporting**

In 2015, the Australian Government committed to the [United Nations \(UN\) endorsed 17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) to end poverty, protect the planet, support good health and wellbeing and reduce inequality by 2030 to enable people to enjoy peace and prosperity. Clearly, we are not there yet. In a similar vein, the Treasury's 2023 [Measuring What Matters](#) framework established a new benchmark for government for measuring Australia's national wellbeing. These frameworks are useful for all governments as a starting point for tracking progress and performance of infrastructure investments.

The framework includes 50 indicators across five themes as it aims to track progress towards a more healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous Australia. As we have attempted to illustrate, all these indicators have a spatial dimension, in other words, levels of health, wellbeing and prosperity vary across regions. While the indicator data is reported for regional areas according to their remoteness, there is no reporting of urban sub-regions, even though there are substantial differences in health and wellbeing within cities.

Based on the Measuring What Matters framework, the Australian Government, having discontinued the National Cities Performance Framework, should continue to develop comprehensive and integrated measures and data reporting on social economic and environmental outcomes that are related to infrastructure funding and linked to impacts at the regional and local scales. Local government involvement in the development of such

monitoring mechanisms is critical to inform relevant data collection, spatial scales and dissemination of reporting on progress.

The [AUO Liveability indicators](#) described in this submission are a good example of indicators, that are grounded in decades of research on the relationships between built environment and social outcomes of health and wellbeing, can be used to monitor progress towards improved spatial distribution of access to affordable housing, transport, education, health, open space and community, sport and recreation and cultural facilities. Further investment in the development of the AUO Liveability tool and other similar research based, spatially disaggregated data and mapping tools, will assist governments in understanding where infrastructure is needed and to track the progress and performance of the contribution of the infrastructure projects to broader nationally agreed goals of productivity and sustainability.

**Recommendation 5:** Prioritise investment in infrastructure that supports equitable social, sustainable, economic and cultural outcomes

**Recommendation 6:** Incorporate spatial and social equity measures into progress, performance and evaluation of federal funding and opportunities.

## Local government is integral to effective infrastructure planning, governance and delivery

NGAA member councils, through their regular and extensive community engagement, have first-hand knowledge of the needs of their communities for:

- enabling infrastructure required to deliver appropriate and affordable housing, balancing rapidly developing greenfield suburbs and the need to protect natural environments
- strategic road and land transport infrastructure and services to minimise congestion while maximising connectivity and providing active transport options
- infrastructure needs to expand economic opportunities for local business and enliven town centres to attract industry investment
- access to health, education, community, cultural, sport and recreational infrastructure for health and wellbeing, and community cohesion.

Our submission is grounded in the view that **local government remains overlooked, underutilised and underestimated in its capacity as a key partner in the planning and delivery of city-shaping and community building infrastructure.**

### **Recommendation 1.**

As a key step towards improving processes and governance and effectiveness of federal financial support provided to state and territory governments for infrastructure development, we recommend that Australian government agencies:

- 1) Elevate the role of local government in the planning, decision-making and implementation of infrastructure development processes.

## Recognise growth areas as nationally significant regions

Our capital cities are where more than two thirds of the Australian population lives. The latest Centre for Population Statement shows capital cities account for 68% of Australia's population which is 18,752,600 people<sup>1</sup>. Capital cities are projected to grow nearly twice as fast as the rest-of-state areas. In fact, population growth in capital cities will account for 80% of Australia's total projected population growth of more than 2.7 million people over the next decade to 2035-36.

But there are clear differences between local government areas *within* capital cities in terms of population size and growth rates, housing, access to facilities and services and diversity within communities. These differences have significant implications for planning, funding, and ultimately, equity and social cohesion.

**Outer metropolitan growth regions are growing significantly faster than inner and middle regions of our capital cities but there is little reflection of this in Government infrastructure investment decision making processes or criteria.**

In the last five years Growth Areas population grew by more than 650,000 - 43% of Australia's growth over that time. By 2024, the resident population in Growth Areas reached more than 5.8 million. Higher birth rates than the national average mean one in four Australian children already live in Growth Areas. This trajectory is set to continue, with more than 7 million people projected to be living in Growth Areas by 2031.

Differences in settlement patterns across regional Australia have long been understood using the nationally accepted Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) in terms of four remoteness regions: inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas.

**There are no equivalent, nationally recognised classifications to differentiate distinct sub-regions within major cities.**

The lack of a definitive and transparent methodology to distinguish growth areas within either the ASGS remoteness structure major cities', Greater Capital Cities Statistical Areas or under the urban structure, limits the recognition of distinct metropolitan regions in state and federal government policy and programs, contributing to spatial inequities that impact their communities.

## A new geographical classification for growth areas

The NGAA is partnering with the University of Adelaide's Australian Centre for Housing Research (ACHR) to develop a transparent methodology, and trialling a new, robust and repeatable classification of growth areas: [A new geographical classification for National Growth Areas<sup>2</sup>](#).

The NGAA aims to advance this work in collaboration with the Centre for Population and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to improve planning and deliver better targeted resource allocation across all portfolios.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government Centre for Population 2025 [Population Statement](#), Commonwealth of Australia, January 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Page, K and Baker, E, 2025, [A New Geographical Classification for National Growth Areas: NGA25](#), Discussion paper for consultation, National Growth Areas Alliance and Australian Centre for Housing Research, University of Adelaide, <https://www.ngaa.org.au/resources/a-new-geographical-classification-for-national-growth-areas-nga25>

This classification will be based on robust, repeatable ABS data, available at the key spatial scales aligned with the Australian Standard Geographical Structure.

**Recommendation 2:**

To improve transparency, consistency and accountability of federal funding decisions we recommend that the Australian Government:

2) Recognise growth areas as nationally significant metropolitan regions requiring a long term, place-based investment framework and apply an agreed classification across agencies to assessment and funding allocation processes.

## Prioritise investment for sustainable urban growth

### Consistency with the National Urban Policy

The [2024 National Urban Policy](#) outlined a shared vision for sustainable urban growth agreed to by the Australian, state and territory governments that commits to

*Ensuring our cities and suburbs meet the needs of current and future generations, our governments commit to collaboratively govern and holistically plan our cities within existing footprints first and with housing affordability as a primary goal.*

Infrastructure development processes and assessment criteria should reflect, and be consistent with, the National Urban Policy goals, with agreed frameworks for measuring alignment, evaluating outcomes, and ensuring accountability across all levels of government against these goals.

### Delivering housing supply and affordability

Australia's 29 Growth Areas – representing just 5% of the nation's 537 councils – are designated to deliver at least 26% of new housing under the Housing Accord targets, without commensurate infrastructure. That's more than another 300,000 homes by 2029 in areas which are already experiencing growth at twice the average national growth rate.

These new dwellings make up about half of all new housing approved in the five largest capital cities. The way in which this next wave of housing supply is delivered will determine the productivity, liveability and sustainability of our cities and the wellbeing of our newest communities for generations.

Almost all new greenfield residential development has been planned to be delivered in metropolitan growth areas, as set out in long term state government planning strategies, but a fundamental constraint on delivering new housing supply in greenfield sites is the need for enabling infrastructure. Enabling infrastructure means the basic utilities that are required before housing construction can begin including connections for water (potable and storm water), sewer, energy and roads.

The most recent UDIA National Housing Pipeline 2024<sup>3</sup> report found that **one third (33%) of development ready greenfield land requires one or more types of enabling**

<sup>3</sup> Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) 2024 [National Housing Pipeline Technical report](#), November 2024, <https://udia.com.au/research-insights/nhp/>

**infrastructure** to progress to dwelling commencement status. The delivery of enabling infrastructure for housing supply is Australia's largest infrastructure project.

**Stronger Commonwealth leadership can provide clarity, certainty and accountability.**

Misalignment between growth area housing delivery and State infrastructure delivery delays national housing targets, diminishes productivity and undermines social cohesion in new communities.

The Federal Government has a critical role to play in addressing these systemic issues. Through targeted enabling infrastructure funding, early feasibility and pre-investment planning, national network coordination, and reform of infrastructure funding models, the Commonwealth can unlock housing supply at scale.

Aligning processes for all sectors of infrastructure, water, energy, transport, communications, and social infrastructure with national policy, state government regional plans and local government strategic planning will improve consistency, transparency and accountability and expedite the delivery of new housing.

**Enhancing liveability in Australia's growth areas**

While the private sector can build homes, especially detached houses, relatively quickly, the complementary infrastructure of roads, transport and community facilities can take decades to be delivered. A 'liveable' community is one that is safe, attractive, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable, with affordable housing, access to open space, health and community services, education, employment, and public transport. Access to these services is directly linked to better physical and mental health outcomes, stronger social cohesion, and higher levels of community satisfaction.

Robust measures of liveability have been developed by the Australian Urban Observatory (AUO) at RMIT University. Partnering with the NGAA, the AUO produced Liveability Scorecards for Growth Areas, which highlighted the disparities in liveability within cities.

### Infrastructure deficits reduce liveability in Growth Areas

Analysis of RMIT's Australian Urban Observatory '[City Liveability Scorecards for Growth Areas](#)' highlights significant differences in access to community infrastructure and services between growth and non-growth areas of capital cities. The Scorecards use data from 10 indicators—such as social infrastructure, walkability, public transport access, open space, and housing affordability—to show how liveability varies by suburb. Analysis of the Scorecards across the five capital cities shows:

- Residents in growth areas face a **37% accessibility gap in public transport**.
- Growth areas have **68% less access to sports and leisure facilities** (Liveability indicator score: 0.07 vs. 0.23).
- Access to **arts and cultural facilities in growth areas is 44% lower** (Liveability indicator score: 0.49 vs. 0.87)
- Access to **health care facilities in growth areas is 48% lower** (Liveability indicator score: 1.25 vs. 2.42).
- Growth areas score **21% lower for access to education facilities** (Liveability indicator score: 1.99 vs. 2.53).

## Resource growth areas equitably aligned to strategic plans and forecasts

A long-term, sustainable place-based funding model is essential to support councils in delivering infrastructure and services, without reliance on piecemeal grants or ad hoc support.

### Aligning population growth projections and infrastructure investment

Future infrastructure planning must be aligned with projected growth and settlement strategies, delivering services in time to support community establishment rather than perpetually playing catch-up.

#### *Road infrastructure*

OMR-E6 Connecting Melbourne's Outer North and West Growth areas of Wyndham, Melton, Mitchell, Hume, Whittlesea

Melbourne's outer north and west are rapidly growing, within municipalities Mitchell, Whittlesea, Hume, Melton, and Wyndham preparing for millions of new residents. Melton is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia with 109,000 new homes targeted for 2051 and projections for 215,000 additional residents by 2046.

Strategic transport infrastructure is vital for these areas. The Outer Metropolitan Ring E6 (OMR-E6) is a planned 70-kilometre corridor linking key regions, featuring up to six road lanes and two freight and two passenger rail tracks for integrated transportation. This major project aims to boost economic growth, ease congestion, and support net-zero emissions through reliable transit.

Similarly in the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire Council growth continues apace with the sub-region predicted to reach almost 700,000 residents by 2036. Councils consider the upgrade and extension of Thompsons Road, from Berwick-Cranbourne Road in Clyde through to Koo Wee Rup Road in Pakenham, as one of the region's highest transport priorities. The upgrades and extensions are planned to provide a 30 kilometre, cross-metropolitan, high-capacity route from Carrum to Pakenham to unlock the southeast employment corridor for freight and employment, attracting an estimated 140,000 jobs and increase economic output by billions of dollars. There is no applicable funding stream for this scale of project which requires both state and federal funding.

### Grant-based infrastructure assessment processes are not appropriate for enabling infrastructure for housing development

In each capital city the need for enabling infrastructure on development ready land is the major constraint preventing achievement of housing targets in Growth Areas. Without a place-based, long-term funding framework for developing growth areas, councils have to resort to grant applications for enabling infrastructure like storm water and connector roads and to advocate for enabling utilities like energy, potable water and sewage.

### Water and sewage

The **Greater Macarthur Growth Region** has the capacity to deliver 120,000 new homes if accompanied by enabling infrastructure. This is 10% of Australia's entire housing target, and 32% of NSW's contribution under the National Housing Accord. The Wilton Growth Area forms part of the Greater Macarthur Growth Region, however, delays in infrastructure provision risk undermining this objective. Wollondilly Shire Council is seeking urgent support to address a significant shortfall in sewer infrastructure in the Wilton Growth Area. The delay of long-planned upgrades to the Bingara Gorge Sewage Treatment Plant is expected to halt delivery of approximately 12,000 already-rezoned housing lots, constraining housing supply in one of the State's key growth areas.

Similarly, the **Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale** in Western Australia, is an emerging growth area in south-eastern Perth has almost 10,000 lots that have been approved but are unable to be developed due to lack of critical enabling infrastructure. Funding for an infill sewer, hills-based water tank, and upgrades to Mundijong Road are urgently needed to enable vital opportunities for housing. As an immediate priority, the Scott Road sewer pump station is urgently needed to enable 7,000 dwellings to be delivered. An allocation of \$12 million for the Scott Road Pump Station is included in the WA Water Corporation future plans but funding needs to be brought forward due to developers' inability to pre-fund the works, which could be reimbursed on completion of construction.

## Long-term, stable funding frameworks are fundamental to effective infrastructure delivery

Long-term stability is essential for sustainable growth. While state planning strategies set out 30-year plans for growth and development, infrastructure funding programs that support urban development tend to rely on short-term, four-year budget cycles leaving them vulnerable to shifts in political priorities.

### Rail infrastructure investments

**The electrification of the 42km Adelaide - Gawler rail line in South Australia is a case study of the need to decouple infrastructure funding for growth areas from political cycles.** Upgrades to the rail line from diesel to electric trains were originally identified in the 1940s, but it was not until 2008 when federal and state funding was allocated for the electrification of the line. However, the project was delayed for over a decade following a change of federal government with funds being reallocated to other projects<sup>4</sup>. In the intervening years, patronage along the Gawler rail line grew by 30 per cent in the decade to 2016 to become the most patronised passenger rail route in Adelaide.<sup>5</sup>

After years of advocacy and lobbying by local government and community, Infrastructure Australia assessed the project to be a high priority in 2018 and work recommenced in 2019, with the electrified rail line finally opened in 2022. Over that time, the population in Adelaide's northern growth area of the City of Playford has grown by 42% from 70,000 in 2006 to nearly 100,000 by 2021. With an annual growth rate of 2.4% and planned greenfield development

<sup>4</sup> Todd Denham, Jago Dodson, Matthew Palm, Carolyn Whitzman, Cathryn Hamilton, Jon Kellett, Paul Maginn Kirsten Martinus 2018, [Transformational projects in Australia's fast growing outer suburbs](#), Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, Melbourne.

<sup>5</sup> Infrastructure Australia, 2018, [Project Evaluation Summary Gawler Rail Line Electrification](#) and Modernisation Project, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

set out in the latest Adelaide Region Plan, the population of the City of Playford is projected to grow by another 50,000 residents by 2036.

#### Rail connection from Macarthur Region to Western Sydney Airport

The Macarthur region in NSW urgently needs a metro rail link to Western Sydney International Airport. Years of limited investment in public transport and roads have led to congestion in Campbelltown, forcing residents to rely heavily on private vehicles for jobs, healthcare, and education. Notably, 70% of cars at Campbelltown train station come from outside the local area, mainly Camden and Wollondilly.

A metro connection from the airport to Campbelltown would allow neighbouring residents to use public transport, freeing up carpark land for better economic uses. Two metro extensions are needed - via Glenfield (Leppington) and between Campbelltown-Macarthur. These would improve worker access to the new airport, support regional mobility, and enhance Campbelltown City's regional role.

### **Better coordination between planning and delivery agencies is essential**

Timely delivery of infrastructure to support development in growth areas requires coordination between agencies at state and federal levels. There are some good examples of coordination at state and local levels that can be adopted federally.

South Australia's [Growth Infrastructure Coordination Unit](#) (GICU), is a dedicated, cross-agency unit for sequencing and co-funding to facilitate infrastructure provision for housing developments in growth corridors across the state. It is an early but promising template for ensuring that infrastructure is well planned and coordinated early in the development process will enable faster, more efficient and better planned communities. The aim is to remove barriers to development by providing certainty and transparency to the development industry to fast track the delivery of housing and enable South Australia to achieve national housing targets

#### *Social Infrastructure*

Under current grant-based processes and without coordinated planning and investment at state and federal levels, proposals for infrastructure for sport, recreation community and cultural facilities compete with proposals for highways, intermodals and other strategic transport infrastructure. For example, Perth and Peel councils have previously submitted proposals to Infrastructure Australia for regional-level sporting facilities in the outer metropolitan areas of Perth, where past undersupply that has not kept up with high population growth. The costs of regional level sporting facilities are prohibitive for individual councils and there are no agreed frameworks for monetising the benefits of community infrastructure in the same way as there are for transport or roads. In this case, councils are leading the collaboration for regional infrastructure planning.

### **The private sector alone will not deliver equitable access to critical infrastructure**

Like water, energy and roads, communications infrastructure is an essential infrastructure for new developments and requires early planning and delivery in growth areas and needs to be considered within a long term, place-based federal funding framework.

### *Communications*

Reliable digital connectivity in growth areas is essential for businesses and households and the national economy. As remote work and distance learning are now customary practice, the need for robust and reliable telecommunications infrastructure is essential in all regions and communities. The federal government introduced the Telecommunications in New Developments (TIND) policy which recognises growth areas require dedicated new communications infrastructure. However, the policy relies on the private sector to provide and determine the locations for infrastructure. Where site options and cost are not favourable from a commercial perspective, growth area communities are left with service coverage gaps and broadband blackspots.

To achieve universally accessible connectivity, telecommunications carriers must work alongside local government and community stakeholders to identify coverage gaps, invest in upgrades, and future-proof new digital infrastructure.

### Ensuring digital connectivity for new communities

**Federal investment in telecommunications infrastructure is critical in the City of Whittlesea, Victoria**, which has grown rapidly to a population of 257,000 in 2025, and is projected to be 355,000 by 2040 – a 38% increase, particularly in areas like Donnybrook, Wollert and Beveridge. The Beveridge Intermodal Precinct, expected to be fully operational by 2028-29, further underscores the urgency for improving connectivity. Yet, in the City of Whittlesea, 41% of mobile coverage is rated as fair or poor, and 10% is unusable. Most notably, 5% of emergency markers have poor or no signal, and more than a third of road segments tested have inadequate coverage<sup>6</sup>.

A developer led, piecemeal approach to connectivity infrastructure is unlikely to deliver universal coverage. Council is continuing to work closely with all levels of government and network providers to deliver practical solutions that improve digital infrastructure for residents, businesses and visitors but requires federal funding to deliver the infrastructure in a systematic way to secure optimal sites, maximise coverage and minimise disruption and delays as the community grows.

### **Long term funding is best practice and proven in Australia**

A 2024 review of international best practices in urban infrastructure funding for NGAA<sup>7</sup>, including examples from the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States of America, highlighted the importance of longevity in funding programs: all had multi-year funding frameworks that provide stability for large-scale projects and ensure consistent investment across political cycles

**Roads infrastructure programs offer a good model for providing local government with dedicated and ongoing funding streams for enabling infrastructure.** Programs such as the Black Spot Program and Roads to Recovery have been a long-established source of funding for local councils to help them deliver safer roads and pedestrian infrastructure identified through systematic planning and scheduled works.

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<sup>6</sup> City of Whittlesea, [Municipal Telecommunications Accessibility Report](#), Cart GIS, September 2024

<sup>7</sup> Morrison N, Gatarin G, and Strickling M (2024) [International Best Practices in Infrastructure Funding: Lessons for Australia's Outer Metropolitan Growth Areas](#), Urban Transformations Research Centre, Western Sydney University.  
<https://doi.org/10.26183/tmc6-gg23>

Funding recipients under the **Roads to Recovery** program, for example, have a set program allocation for each five-year program cycle and councils can choose the projects on which they will spend their funding based on local priorities. Similarly, the **Safer Local Roads** and Infrastructure Program, funds projects which address current and emerging priorities in road infrastructure needs in an application-based, ongoing funding stream of around \$200 million per year.

## Other related matters

### Cost Considerations: New versus Existing Infrastructure

The high costs of new infrastructure in greenfield areas are well-documented, but the costs of retrofitting infrastructure in established areas also requires serious attention.

Evidence from RMIT research in the City of Wyndham, and the City of Casey<sup>8</sup> demonstrates that early delivery of reliable, frequent bus services fosters long-term public transport use and reduces car dependency. We encourage consideration of shared funding models involving developers, local governments that support early delivery of infrastructure to greenfield communities as they are being established.

Future infrastructure investment must balance these factors, ensuring decisions are based on long-term cost-effectiveness and community outcomes. Further research into the costs and efficiencies of retrofitting infrastructure is recommended.

### Hidden Costs to Local Government

Infrastructure delivery gaps impose significant hidden costs on local governments, particularly in growth areas. Councils are increasingly required to deliver infrastructure without sufficient funding support, such as the need for unfunded traffic calming devices around schools.

### Improve Asset Management of Government Infrastructure

Growth area councils face growing maintenance liabilities with limited funding. Integrated state-local asset reporting, backed by dedicated resourcing, will ensure that infrastructure in fast-growing areas remains safe, sustainable, and efficient over time.

### Create and preserve opportunities for future major infrastructure projects

Future proofing growth areas by preserving transport, health, and green infrastructure corridors is essential. We recommend spatially targeted land preservation strategies to avoid future cost blowouts and service deficits. The OMR/E6 is a good example of forward planning in a geographic where growth is mandated to occur.

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<sup>8</sup>Annette Kroen, Robin Goodman, Lucy Gunn, Steve Pemberton 2021, [Early delivery of equitable and healthy transport options in new suburbs](#), Final Report. Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, Melbourne.

## Supporting Evidence

This submission is underpinned by research by leading urban researchers:

- NGAA and Australian Centre for Housing Research (2025) [New Geographical Classification System for National Growth Areas NGA25: Discussion Paper](#), University of Adelaide.
- National Growth Areas Alliance (2025) [Beyond Bricks: Delivering the housing we need sooner in Australia's Growth Areas](#)
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