

Supporting communities in Melbourne's east

Priorities for Federal Government action







Contents

Melbourne's east	4
About the region	5
Our Economy	6
Pathways to employment	7
Our Communities	8
Mental Health: Access and coordination	9
Affordable Housing: Youth Foyers; Land assembly	11
Our Environment	12
Renewables for the region	13
Renewables for business	14
Our Infrastructure	16
Trails	17
Rail duplication and capacity uplift	18
Reducing congestion on key roads	20
About the ERG	22



Melbourne's east

Just 15km from Melbourne's CBD and extending east into the Yarra and Dandenong Ranges, the eastern region is a major population centre and one of Melbourne's most diverse, productive and dynamic regions. The region enjoys a significant industry base in advanced manufacturing, wholesale / distribution, health services, education, retail and tourism.

About the region

The eastern region stretches over 278,928 hectares from middle and outer ring suburbs of Glen Waverley, Box Hill and Ringwood, to townships such as Warrandyte, Yarra Junction and Olinda in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

There are almost 1 million residents, 20 per cent of Melbourne's total metropolitan population. More than 33 per cent of residents were born overseas, mainly in China, the UK and India.

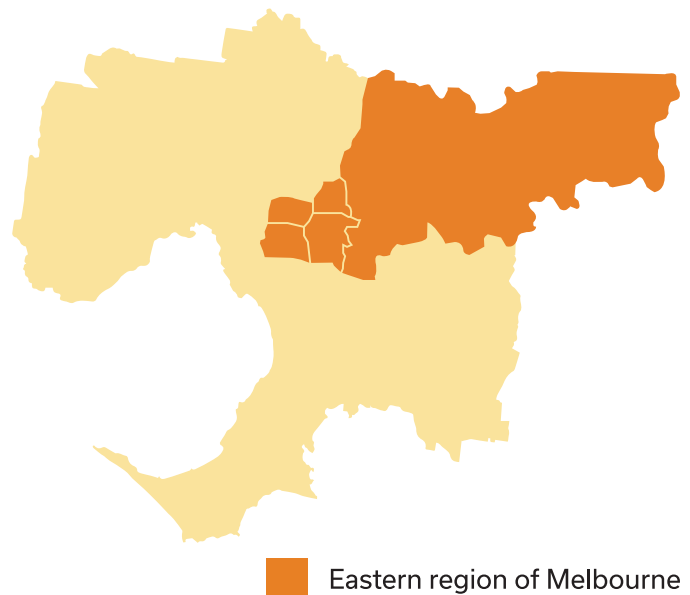
Some 75,000 businesses employ 400,000 people across the region, with key job hubs in the Monash National Employment and Innovation Cluster and Bayswater Business Precinct.

The gross revenue or total sales/income generated in the region is estimated at almost \$99 billion, generating a gross regional product of \$59 billion annually.

The manufacturing sector is of greatest value but not the largest employer. The top five employing industries are health care and social assistance; retail trade; education and training; manufacturing; and construction.

The region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nations.

The ERG is advocating for a range of capital works and projects to support our communities, grow our economy, and sustain our built and natural environment.



As a long-established region, there is a need to augment and improve facilities to support contemporary needs, address service gaps and build the regional economy.

Our Economy

The region's economy is significant. The region has 16 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs, contributes \$59 billion in GRP annually and enjoys well-developed infrastructure and access to a highly skilled workforce, however unemployment is increasing, particularly in the outer east.

Over the year since the COVID emergency began, the outer east suffered the second largest year on year fall in the number of people employed (after the Mornington Peninsula) out of all regions in Victoria.

The quarterly employment by industry data demonstrates this drop was driven by employment falls across construction, education, Health care and social assistance and a number of services industries including accommodation and food services, administrative and a range of personal and support services.

For the year to December 2020 there are large unemployment rate increases in Yarra Ranges (2.8%) and Knox (2.7%) putting these LGAs in the top ten unemployment rate increases by LGAs across Victoria.

We want to ensure that diverse local employment opportunities support an adaptable workforce, address the decline in manufacturing jobs and ready our communities for the jobs of the future.



Pathways to employment

Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force participation figures show rates of unemployment are increasing faster in the outer east than for most of Victoria.

To remedy job losses and create local job pathways, the ERG is seeking \$450,000 project funding to engage industry, government and academia to retain jobs and plan and prepare for future jobs in Melbourne's east.

The steady loss of 'value-adding' manufacturing jobs is a major concern due to the high-level of integration and value-generation they bring. Such jobs add to employment diversity and require professional skills and training. Job diversity strengthens local economies and helps create vibrant 20-minute neighbourhoods.

A misalignment between skills industry need and what schools produce can lead to increased joblessness and insecurity for students. Such insecurity can encourage many students to undertake further education or simply move into service industries, where they are lost to manufacturing.

Many students do not fully understand the extent and breadth of the career pathway options that exist in this region and support the key industry sectors.

The ERG wants to foster industry-school interactions to better align skills with industry needs and raise awareness of the number and diversity of local career opportunities and pathways.

We want to build on our regions strengths and foster supply chains and value chains within the region and explore how our traditional industries can support emerging technologies, such as for the electric vehicle industry.

Melbourne's east and south east have long played a key role across all points of Australia's automotive industry.

Deakin University is leading research into battery technology and businesses across the region are already playing a part in the emerging EV industry.

The ERG will bring together these industries, government and academia and explore how key sectors can grow, local workforces promoted to local employers, and broker increased workplace exposure for students and trainees.

What is needed

\$450,000 project funding to engage key industry sectors to better support and retain local jobs, industry and businesses in Melbourne's east.

This will enable:

- Engagement and better alignment of skills with a focus on the regions highest value sectors
- Broaden awareness of the economic base, allied industries and employment opportunities available in key manufacturing sectors
- Development of local sector pathway maps for those sectors and occupations that share common skills, knowledge, and interests
- A 'deep dive' into the electric vehicle industry, including battery technology and e-bikes to leverage the extensive range of engineering and automotive industry skills and experience existing in the region

Our Communities

Equity of access to housing, services and infrastructure helps address disadvantage and build social cohesion. Adolescence and early adulthood are formative periods in a person's life. For young people struggling with their mental health, early intervention and support can help them get their lives back on track.

We want to achieve more resilient and cohesive communities that enjoy better health and wellbeing and can easily access the services they need.



Mental Health

Mental health services in the eastern region are fragmented, overstretched, hard to navigate, and for many people are in locations that are almost impossible to access using public transport. This causes confusion and delay for people needing mental health support, and for young people the situation can be dire.

ERG is seeking expansion of headspace services, more outreach services across the region, including a new headspace facility in Manningham and expansion of the Youth Mental Health First Aid program. Service planning and coordination must be improved so that the system is easier to navigate and presents as a 'single door' service system.

With nearly 25 per cent of young people with some form of mental illness, timely and convenient access to appropriate services is critical.

Young people who cannot easily access youth mental health services face poorer outcomes such as failing to complete school, unemployment, self-harm or suicide.

Yarra Ranges has one of the worst rates for mental health in the state, and family violence rates in the outer east are among the highest in Victoria.

The pandemic has, by statewide standards, seen notable spikes in job losses and unemployment rates in the outer east.

The Federal Government's headspace program provides a vital and successful service for young people. headspace is a highly effective program providing early intervention to 12-25-year-olds under the National Youth Mental Health Foundation.

headspace services are hard to access across the region. Each headspace in the east has a very long waiting list. Combined with the typical waiting time to see specialist psychologists when referred, people in need and their families are enduring enormous hardship and deterioration in health.

Young people in Manningham who rely on public transport have great difficulty in accessing services. Travelling by bus or train can take up to 80 minutes to reach the nearest headspace centre, causing flow-on impacts, including worsening isolation and depression.

The situation is even worse for young people travelling from more isolated suburbs such as Park Orchards, Ringwood North, Warrandyte South and Wonga Park who need to navigate multiple connecting bus routes, and walk between bus/train stops, interchanges and the services.

People with a disability face even more barriers to access. Acute mental health service provision must be a primary and immediate focus of government. This focus can be strengthened through complementary prevention and community strengthening initiatives.

There are many great initiatives with proven track records coordinated and supported by local government. For example, the successful roll out of Youth Mental Health First Aid to 18 local schools by Maroondah City Council.

It is tried, tested and respected - and if expanded would bring enormous benefit to communities throughout the east - and alleviate demands on the public health system and government.

Service planning for the future

Meeting the immediate mental health needs for treatment and prevention is crucial and cannot wait.

However, early intervention and a coordinated approach to guide the longer-term meeting of needs is in the best interests of everyone – the community, practitioners and government.

Improved coordination to meet needs and identify gaps for Melbourne's east would ensure that investment and services are targeted and responsive to identified needs – geographically, demographically and by service type. This will improve service coordination and, importantly, make the system easier to navigate.

Planning is needed to ensure that the service type, level and location delivers a comprehensive and accessible service system to address the current barriers to access and ensure that expanded headspace programs are complemented by Adult Mental Health services and improved access to services for 8-12-year-olds.

Understanding regional needs and gaps would map current and planned services, inform a much-needed navigation tool and facilitate a 'single door' service system for users.

Health providers and the broader range of council, school and community referral points could better identify the right and most direct service pathway for those in need and enhance councils' delivery of community support, parenting and social connection programs.

What is needed

Immediate Federal Government funding to:

- expand headspace services and outreach services across the region to reduce the backlog in demand and long waiting lists particularly for Monash, Knox (and Lilydale) headspace services
- provide a new headspace facility at Manningham
- expand Youth Mental Health First Aid program to schools across the eastern region
- improve service planning and coordination, making the system easier to navigate and presenting a 'single door' service system.



Housing our communities

Nearly 8000 families in Melbourne's eastern region don't have safe, secure and affordable housing. That figure is expected to climb to more than 11,400 by 2036 unless urgent action is taken.

Only 54 per cent of housing needs can be met by the current social housing supply and estimated affordable private rentals across the region.

To support vulnerable residents at risk of homelessness, the ERG is seeking Commonwealth land, buildings and direct funding for more Youth Foyers and to provide crisis accommodation and social housing for women and children fleeing family violence.

In the east, homelessness is most likely to affect women and children fleeing family violence, people with a disability, people living with a mental health condition, people living in poverty and marginalised groups.

Affordable housing provides individuals and families with the base they need to build fulfilled, productive lives and contribute to society.

The main factors harming affordability are rising rents in the private rental market and the inadequate supply of social housing.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows that the key drivers of homelessness across our region are housing and financial issues (50%), and domestic and family violence (38%).

ERG councils support the Charter Group of Councils – 13 councils collaborating on a Housing First approach to homelessness and working towards:

- value capture to fund affordable and social housing
- mandatory contributions to provide affordable and social housing
- well-located services and infrastructure to support community integration
- greater community support for social housing

More social housing is the first step to address complex social and health needs and stem the increase in suburban homelessness.

The Youth Foyer, such as at Holmesglen TAFE, has successfully demonstrated supported accommodation for students, helping them to achieve education and employment outcomes.

What is needed

Federal Government funding for:

- Youth Foyers to accommodate vulnerable youth
- transitional housing for young people and their families
- crisis accommodation for women and children fleeing family violence

Our Environment

Globally there is significant concern about the future of the planet and the need to address climate change. Resource conservation and climate action can help accelerate economic recovery and enhance social equity. Access to clean air, water and to nature are central to health and wellbeing.

We want to be a region known for environmental stewardship and responses to sustainability.



Renewables for the region

Suburban landfill sites can pose health, safety and environmental challenges restricting uses that could benefit communities. Under remediation, they can provide a viable best-use option for hosting solar farms which are hard to develop at commercial scale in suburban settings.

The Eastern Region Group is seeking \$25 million in Federal Government funding to pilot two solar farms with battery storage, one in Knox and another in Yarra Ranges.

Melbourne's outer east has two landfill sites in Yarra Ranges and Knox ideally suited to host solar farms.

Knox City Council has completed a feasibility study for a 4.99MW solar farm with large scale battery storage on a landfill site in Wantirna. The 4.99MW solar farm has the potential to generate almost 2.5 times council's total energy consumption.

A detailed business case is currently being prepared. The initial feasibility work indicated that along with substantial greenhouse gas savings, the solar farm could return \$400,000 plus an additional \$1 million from the battery storage in revenue per annum. The business case will provide further detail around the proposal.

The project is expected to support about 50 local jobs and would feature several key innovations that can be replicated and scaled-up across other landfill solar opportunity sites across Australia.

Yarra Ranges Council is looking to make use of old landfill sites at Wesburn and Healesville for a combined 5.4MWp solar energy generation project that will produce enough electricity to power 1000 local homes, generate a net positive income of \$280,000 through selling of excess solar power and provide economic stimulus to the region with 48 full time jobs and ongoing employment.

Use of the closed landfill sites as solar farms represents a high-value use of low-value land.

These projects have significant and far reaching potential, generating clean, renewable power and providing large scale energy storage to enhance grid security, and potentially supply excess power to the community through a council led retailer pilot.

These solar projects are innovative, financially viable and bring a range of benefits to the community.

Around 100 jobs would be created during the construction phase – much needed in a region hard-hit by the Covid pandemic.

What is needed

The Eastern Region Group is seeking \$25 million in Federal Government funding to build solar farms with battery storage, one in Knox and another in Yarra Ranges.

Renewables for business

Many mid-sized businesses in the region want to meet sustainability targets, lower energy costs and have more electricity price certainty so they can maintain jobs and grow their businesses.

The ERG is seeking Federal Government seed funding of \$700,000 to facilitate a renewable Power Purchase Agreement aggregator for mid-sized electricity users and support them through the procurement process.

The best option is to use renewable Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) which have become the biggest driver of investment in new renewable energy projects in recent years. Mid-sized businesses lack the scale, skills, expertise and capability to contract their own PPA.

Corporate PPAs deliver benefits including:

- stable electricity prices and lower costs
- aggregated demand to support new solar or wind farms and accelerate installed capacity
- delivery of climate change targets

A third-party facilitator is needed to individual energy users together into a collective buying group to access renewable PPAs and fill a major gap in the Victorian energy market.

Existing collective purchasing models such as Melbourne Renewable Energy Projects (MREP) and the Victorian Energy Collaboration (VECO) demonstrate the viability, replicability and scalability of group PPA models.

MREP transformed how large energy users bought electricity and paved the way for more than 80 public and private sector organisations to join group PPAs.

VECO, facilitated by Victorian Greenhouse Alliances, is the biggest emissions reduction project undertaken by local government in Australia enabling 46 councils to switch to 100 per cent renewable energy from mid-2021.

Outside of these council-led initiatives, there has been no progress towards group PPAs in Victoria and only five other group PPAs in Australia, including SSROC in NSW and the South Australia Chamber of Mines and Energy.

MREP provides the only examples of group PPAs involving a diversity of industries – manufacturing, property, universities, finance, local government and cultural institutions.

Significant demand for group PPAs is expected with a Business Renewables Centre Australia survey identifying 20 interested organisations. The City of Melbourne has identified five organisations interested in a MREP3.

PPA facilitators are needed. Transacting a PPA is hard, with buyer understanding a key barrier. The Business Renewables Centre performs vital educational and capacity building for buyers, however their remit does not support buyers through the entire transaction.

A project facilitator is essential for success. The facilitator would support and coordinate all parties in a PPA as no entity is resourced to do that work. With seed funding, a third party PPA facilitator would deliver a series of group PPAs with an aggregate load of 100 GWh each, develop a financially sustainable fee-for-service model for ongoing PPA facilitation and enable future projects to be delivered through cost-recovery.

Each group PPA would leverage ~\$150M of energy spend from buyers, catalyse 100MW of installed capacity, create 200+ construction jobs, 10-30 manufacturing job and 11-17 ongoing jobs.

Creating a third-party facilitator is an efficient, low-risk, low-cost way for energy users to save money, reduce emissions and drive investment in Victoria's renewable energy market. The facilitator would be supported by Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA) lead councils and MREP and VECO have agreed to provide insights, expertise and IP.

A group PPA process costs about \$700,000. This will reduce with each subsequent PPA and through cost sharing between buyers.

What is needed

The Eastern Region Group is seeking \$700,000 to establish a third-party facilitator to deliver a PPA for businesses in the region.



Our infrastructure

Covid restrictions and population growth have changed the way we move around. Active local centres are essential for 20-minute neighbourhoods but transport connections across the region have not kept pace and must improve to enable equitable access to jobs and services.

We want our buildings and infrastructure to promote social cohesion and equality of opportunity in a region that's easy to get around and where active or public transport is preferred for short distances.



Trails

Melbourne's eastern trail network supports local and regional economic development, local connections, sustainability and improved safety.

What is needed

Funding is needed for priorities identified in the Eastern Region Trails Strategy:

- **Box Hill Rail Trail** - first section from Mont Albert to Box Hill. \$20 million shared pathway along the rail corridor to facilitate safe access and movement for pedestrians and bike riders between activity centres.
- **Main Yarra Trail** - extension to link to Warrandyte. \$3 million new trail connection to the Warrandyte Township, extending the Main Yarra Trail east by 3.7km.
- **Ringwood to Croйдon Rail Trail** - to complete the Eastern Rail Trail from the CBD to Warburton. \$10 million for 6.5km of missing shared pathways, with some exclusive sections along the rail corridor and O'Shannassy Pipe Track.
- **Waverley Rail Trail** - to connect Carmel Avenue to Huntingdale Road. \$1 million shared pathway to close the last gap and form a continuous 6.5km trail connecting Holmesglen and Glen Waverley activity centres.
- **Yarra Valley Trail** - extension to connect Yarra Glen to Healesville (Stage 2). \$15 million shared path. When all three stages are complete the Yarra Valley Trail will be 60km of continuous trail and southern and northern Yarra Glen loops offering recreation and tourism opportunities.
- **Ferny Creek Trail** - extension to connect Acacia Road to Glenfern Valley Bushland Reserve in Yarra Ranges. \$1 million.

ERG councils are ready to deliver these vital pieces of Melbourne's Bicycle Network in partnership with the Federal Government.



The Eastern Region Trails network will be nationally significant. With only 10% more patronage, the Melbourne to Warburton Trail alone would deliver 45,000 more visitors, creating a total economic benefit of \$4.716 million and long-term jobs for 34 people.

Rail duplication to build network capacity

The quality and reliability of rail services is declining as demand along the Belgrave and Lilydale corridors grows, and the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) links new stations to this corridor.

ERG is seeking about \$46 million for the immediate duplication of 4.4 kilometres of track between Lilydale and Mooroolbark - a key corridor with the potential for seamless integration of transport modes and linkages across metropolitan Melbourne.

Driven by population and economic growth, significant planned investment in transport across the region risks failing to deliver a fully integrated network and convenient transport system.

Already demand has led to disruptions on the corridor that can cascade and impact commuters on the wider rail network. Overcrowding of peak services on the corridor also indicates that the system is reaching capacity.

The provision of additional service capacity and reliability is limited by sections of single track. To maximise the number of trains that can operate on the line and prevent cascading service disruptions through Ringwood to Box Hill and beyond, the Mooroolbark to Lilydale section of track needs to be duplicated urgently.

Duplication is supported by PTV's Network Development Plan. This final single-track section is not fit for modern metro train services. Trains turn at Lilydale in a minimum of 5-6 minutes, meaning extra train services cannot be provided.

Duplicating this line enables more services to operate, improves performance on the overall network and prevents delays caused by trains waiting for the track to become available.

More services through to Lilydale improves its role and reliability as the hub servicing the Yarra Valley. This corridor links the Yarra Valley to metropolitan Melbourne via transit interchanges at Ringwood and with SRL East at Box Hill, already a regional transport hub.

The SRL should transform how people move about the region. While waiting for the SRL's construction, express bus routes should mirror its alignment and link Deakin University with Box Hill Station, Doncaster, Bulleen, Heidelberg and La Trobe University. The Box Hill Transit Interchange is in need of full redevelopment to bring together rail, bus and tram services and optimise the network benefits of the SRL.

What is needed

About \$46 million is needed to duplicate 4.4km of track between Lilydale and Mooroolbark and ensure this project is coordinated and connected to get the most of the SRL for the region.



Reducing congestion on key roads

Lockdowns and restrictions aside, Melbourne's roads are congested, and public transport patronage is down. Congestion has negative effects on health, greenhouse emissions, productivity and wastes our time. With much of region's public transport delivered by buses, we need to get our road system right and cars out of buses way.

Caulfield – Monash – Rowville corridor

With heavy rail long overdue, innovative solutions must be supported to service the transport needs of one of Melbourne's busiest suburban transport corridors. The ERG seeks federal and state government support to prepare a business case for a trackless tram connecting Caulfield Station and Rowville via Chadstone and Monash University.

The jobs-rich, bustling eastern region of Monash and southern region of Knox are significantly car-dependent and struggle with congestion on the area's freeways and arterial roads.

While the Wellington Road SmartBus has assisted in providing an interim solution, these services are hampered by road congestion and bus capacity. A more substantial solution is needed to improve transport choice and access to enable residents across Melbourne's outer east to access jobs.

A number of options for the corridor, including light and heavy rail, have been proposed but little progress has been made.

In lieu of a long-term solution being agreed and delivered by government, Monash University and Vicinity Centres have developed a practical, shorter-term solution that includes a Trackless Rapid Transit project.

In the long-term a heavy rail public transport option must be delivered in the Wellington Road corridor.

Meanwhile, important considerations for the trackless tram proposal include the provision of sustainable transport (electric vehicles) and integration between transport modes throughout the corridor, including the Suburban Rail Loop.

What is needed

The ERG calls on Federal and State Governments to prepare a business case to evaluate the implementation of the trackless tram proposal along a dedicated public transport corridor, connecting Caulfield Station and Rowville via Chadstone and Monash University, in line with the recent analysis undertaken by Monash University and Vicinity Centres.



Getting buses and cars out of each other's way

ERG is seeking resources for dedicated right-of-way bus lanes, bus priority treatments at intersections, more efficient bus stop placement and implementation of Bus "Stations" along key corridors.

Getting our key arterial roads to flow efficiently is in everyone's interests.

Car drivers don't want to be held up behind buses stopping frequently to pick up passengers or queuing to get through intersections. Commuters weigh up whether buses ploughing slowly through traffic is a better choice than jumping in their cars and taking their chances on the roads.

Cars and buses can co-exist very effectively with the right planning and infrastructure.

Pressure on our roads and the efficiency and reliability of buses can be improved by providing bus priority at traffic signals, real-time and intelligent transport solutions, and dedicated priority bus lanes.

This will increase the attractiveness of public transport when compared with private vehicle travel, increase ridership and reduce congestion.

Bus priority improvements are needed across Melbourne's east. Small-scale road infrastructure upgrades will make a significant contribution to relieving congestion and benefit all users – car, bus and freight.

Greater measures are needed to prioritise buses on our roads. Suggested improvements include:

- Bus lanes and priority treatments at key intersections along the **Mount Dandenong Road Corridor** – a key connection between Ringwood, Croydon and Montrose
- Bus lanes and bus priority (jump signalisation) along **Canterbury Road** (from Great Ryrie Street to Liverpool Road, Kilsyth)
- Separated right-of-way bus lanes, priority at the 20+ intersections, Bus "Stations" with improved passenger facilities (shelter, seating, lighting, real-time information, footpath access and accessibility, and off-board ticketing along the **Doncaster Road corridor** to address high patronage levels and delay
- Install traffic signals at the intersection of **Burwood Highway** with Cathies Lane in Wantirna to improve safety for vehicles entering Burwood Highway at the crest whilst improving bus priority and bike connection
- Peak-only bus lanes along **Wantirna Road** in Ringwood to allow buses to run independently of traffic at the most congested times in the morning and afternoon peak
- A 500-metre inbound bus lane and bus priority improvements on Thompson Road. **Bulleen** at the Eastern Freeway intersection.

What is needed

ERG is seeking resources for:

- dedicated right-of-way bus lanes with exclusive priority operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week and targeted peak hour only dedicated bus lanes
- bus priority treatments at intersections (signal phasing, bus jump lanes)
- implementation of Bus "Stations" along key corridors with high patronage
- more efficient bus stop placement

The ERG

The Eastern Regional Group of Councils (ERG) comprises six local government authorities of eastern Melbourne - Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.

ERG councils collaborate and partner on shared priorities through advocacy, integrated planning, shared services and joint procurement on behalf of the region's communities.

Vision

Our vision for the eastern region is to be a connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous region.

Mission

The ERG's mission is to work together to make lives better, create better places and deliver better performance across all councils.

Our activities are focused in four areas:

- **Our communities** – health, wellbeing and social connectedness is improved
- **Our environment** – enables sustainable living and access to nature
- **Our economy** – a connected, competitive, diverse and prosperous region
- **Our infrastructure and buildings** – promote social cohesion, health and equality of opportunity

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**Melbourne's
eastern region.
One united voice.**