

# Submission

## Mount Barker District Council response to the development of a State Infrastructure Strategy - 31 July, 2019

### Introduction

This submission has been prepared in response to the issues and questions posed by the State Government's Discussion Paper regarding the development of a 20 year State Infrastructure Strategy.

### Context

Mount Barker is undergoing significant change and over the next 30 years, with population growth, the town of Mount Barker will become a city – the second largest in South Australia behind the City of Adelaide. By 2049, the population of the district will be more than 60,000 with 45,000 of these in Mount Barker itself and the remainder in the rest of the district – in total an additional 30,000 residents.

Mount Barker has the population growth that other regions may wish for and the conveniences of the capital city close by. However, with growth comes many challenges that Mount Barker shares with other high growth areas.

Council is one of only 2 South Australian members of the National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA), recognising its status as the fastest growing inland Council area in the country with population growth in excess of 2.5% per annum. The NGAA Policy Platform - Reform and Rebalance Cities Policy - calls for interventions that better align the distribution of new jobs growth, transport and social infrastructure to growth areas that will support polycentric and better performing cities, characterised by multiple activity hubs critical for the nation's economic and social sustainability.

All levels of government must play a role in rebalancing the spatial structure of our cities through evidence-based planning which integrates land use, transport and social infrastructure more responsibly and more equitably. Planning must adopt an integrated and place-based approach to development and infrastructure sequencing.

New neighbourhoods on the urban fringes must promote more sustainable use of resources, retain and restore biodiversity and create attractive and comfortable places for people to live and visit. This is as much a social and environmental imperative as it is an economic one.

Adopting urban design protocols at the neighbourhood level to create active and passive green space and incorporate next-generation green infrastructure to mitigate stresses such as the urban heat island effect is vital. Further, Council would suggest that rather than ensure green infrastructure is 'appropriately accommodated' as suggested on page 15, that it should be the basis on which we build our towns and cities of the future.

Infrastructure is central to economic growth, and investment in the right projects can help to bridge the gap between population and employment. Between 2011 and 2016 areas of rapid population growth (including Mount Barker) received only 13% of infrastructure investment

while they accommodated 35% of national population growth and 25% of jobs growth (*adapted from State of Australia's Fast Growing Outer Suburbs*, .id (the population experts) for NGAA, 2018, p37 (accessed at <https://ngaa.org.au/research#State of Australia's>)

The national infrastructure backlog is reflected acutely at the local scale in Mount Barker with potential rail infrastructure, roads, sport and recreation and wastewater some of the areas where there is a shortfall.

The infrastructure shortfall combined with high population growth will produce a range of economic and social issues, including:

- The quality and quantity of local employment opportunities;
- Access to employment in other locations, which is associated with long commuting times, high car dependency and the standard of public transport provision;
- The quality, diversity and affordability of housing; and
- Social cohesion, liveability, culture and amenity, including access to education, health care, and cultural, entertainment and sporting facilities.

Research by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) shows that capital investment in a region such as transport, telecommunications, community and social infrastructure including universities, hospital and cultural assets is a core driver of economic activity and growth. (*adapted from State of Australia's Fast Growing Outer Suburbs*, .id (the population experts) for NGAA, 2018, p3 (accessed at <https://ngaa.org.au/research#State of Australia's>).

It is noted that the joint 2014 Council / SA Government Strategic Infrastructure Plan, whilst 5 years old, is an important reference document for infrastructure planning and development. Council is also currently working on a 30 Year Plan for Mount Barker city and anticipates community consultation on this document later in 2019.

Mount Barker District Council congratulates the State Government on developing an Infrastructure Strategy and welcomes the opportunity to influence its development within this context and with the aim of improving the delivery of services and infrastructure for the betterment of our region and state. Our submission is based on issues faced by this Council and its surrounding region, organised under the key infrastructure sectors identified in the discussion paper.

## **Transport**

### Public Transport

Council was the major funding partner in the recent Adelaide Hills - Fleurieu Peninsula Regional Public Transport Study. The main findings from the study were that public transport services to the region are inadequate and, importantly, public transport is currently not supporting economic growth in the region

The study identified the significant underfunding of public transport in SA and reviewed the potential to build a rail link from the Adelaide CBD to Mount Barker. A fast rail link would be a catalyst infrastructure development that would stimulate a myriad of regional benefits and warrants further investigation and inclusion in the State Infrastructure Strategy.

Other specific issues identified in the study are highlighted below:

- Except for during the peak periods to and from Adelaide CBD, the frequency of bus services is generally very low or not available, and consequently most bus services are poorly patronised.
- Network coverage is only good in the Adelaide to Mount Barker corridor, but elsewhere throughout the region, in the towns and between towns, it is very poor.
- Park n Ride capacity is significantly exceeded in the Adelaide Hills and in Mount Barker.
- There are issues with fare inequity with different metro and regional fares throughout the region and with ticketing systems that are not integrated
- There is poor integration between service providers
- Public transport information on the websites, signage, at visitor information centres and in tourist information is incomplete, poor quality and not integrated.
- The amenity and the access to bus stops is generally poor and not attractive.
- Population growth and changing demographics will create more issues for transport with public transport as a poor alternative for choice users.

A much improved public transport system will also help South Australia take the lead on reducing emissions from the transport sector – (pg 33 of the discussion paper).

The study can be accessed here [Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula Regional Public Transport Study](#)

### Road Transport

Council is also working in partnership with the State Government on the timely delivery of required road transport infrastructure to cater for growth.

This includes the upgrading of portions of the arterial road network and the Adelaide Road freeway interchange at Mount Barker, the delivery of the Mount Barker growth area connector road (Heysen Boulevard), additional park and rides, addressing freeway connectivity at Verdun near Hahndorf and overcoming Hahndorf Main Street congestion arising from freight and other traffic and providing a more efficient freight route.

In relation to road transport, infrastructure should also consider how to best accommodate and drive the fast uptake of electric vehicles to set and meet ambitious emission reduction goals (pg 33 of the discussion paper).

**Council's submission:** The State Infrastructure Strategy should consider the provision of a fast and efficient public transport solution for the Mount Barker - Adelaide corridor. In the short to medium term this should include a 'Rapid Bus Transit' system including new park and ride facilities at Verdun and a new freeway interchange that accommodates vehicle access to and from Mount Barker at Hahndorf/Verdun. In the longer term, a passenger rail option should be investigated and planned for.

The Strategy should also include the timely and orderly delivery of the remainder of the connector road in the Mount Barker growth area, including the associated infrastructure required for cyclists and pedestrians. Council's preference is that the whole road be built at once with upfront funding support from Government. The upgrading of the Adelaide Road – SE freeway interchange should also be included in the strategy.

## Education

Council's Strategic Plan emphasises the relevance and importance of a learning community to the future sustainability and wellbeing of the district and Council is actively pursuing opportunities that will see this vision realised. Strategies include:

- Engaging with institutions, government and the private sector to develop education and learning facilities
- Promoting a culture of positive education and learning throughout the community; and
- Providing opportunities for residents to participate in learning and engagement

A priority identified in Council's economic development strategy is attracting a university presence in Mount Barker as the first stage in fostering an 'innovation ecosystem' where, ultimately, a co-created niche innovation district could establish.

As a discreet, small but growing city, close to Adelaide, there is an opportunity in Mount Barker to progress an economy that combines work, education, housing, recreation and lifestyle underpinned by a supportive and future thinking community and a collaborative approach between Council, the secondary and tertiary sectors, State and Federal Government and the business community.

The current population of Mount Barker is approximately 15,000. Over 3,500 of those people are students (primary and secondary) who are enrolled across 7 schools in Mount Barker. By 2036, it is anticipated there will be an additional 4,265 students (primary and secondary) living in Mount Barker (i.e. a total of 7,765 students). Over the next 30 years, by 2049, the Mount Barker population is anticipated to rise to 50,000, with approximately 10,000 of those people students (primary and secondary).

Council modelling indicates only 35% of the current students in Mount Barker attend a government school, with the remaining 65% attending a private school. Such a split represents an almost reversal of the State and National trend which sees 70% of students attending a government school and only 30% attending a private school.

Over the next 30 years, there will be an additional 2 new reception to year 12 non-government schools in Mount Barker. This will continue to exacerbate the current public / private split. Currently there are 3 independent high schools and 1 public high school in the Council district. If Mount Barker High School is to offer a competitive public school offering it will need considerable investment.

Our ambition as a community should be that people move to the Mount Barker District in order that their children can go to an excellent and high achieving public primary or high school.

**Council's submission:** Provision of accessible, high quality public education in Mount Barker needs to be prioritised in the State Infrastructure Strategy as do developing opportunities in the higher education sector. Council seeks to partner with the State and Federal government and the private sector to achieve this goal.

## Digital

The future prosperity of our communities is increasingly tied to technology infrastructure, literacy and related opportunities.

The internet, smartphones, social media, information sharing, ecommerce and the roll-out of the NBN is offering significant opportunities, enabling new channels for service delivery, business process improvement, community consultation, innovation and economic development.

However, business grade broadband services in the Mount Barker CBD are limited to a small number of providers and costs are prohibitive, which is a limiting factor for the development of new business opportunities and innovation. Council is considering how it can facilitate increased capacity and infrastructure for internet services.

**Council's submission:** Provision of high speed internet services to enable a Gig City economy is identified as a priority for Mount Barker. The State Infrastructure Strategy must consider equitable and affordable access to these services as critical enablers to the new economy and how the necessary infrastructure is delivered to achieve this.

## Health

The Mount Barker District Council's growth area requires substantial community facility and open space development to meet the future health needs of the community. The council area is family dominated, although there is also a significant ageing population. The community is not overly affluent and financial stress from mortgages and renting is relatively high. This highlights the need for diverse and affordable facilities and activity opportunities.

Over recent years council has focussed on planning for urban development including open space, infrastructure and built assets, and more recently on delivering these facilities and assets. This is a costly task that cannot be achieved with the current or future rate base alone and support from the State and Federal governments is required, in addition to developer contributions, to contribute to achieving the required facilities and ultimately supporting healthy and connected communities.

With the past and current focus on establishing facilities and assets, limited consideration has been given to the provision and facilitation of health related programs and services. As the population increases there is increasing high demand for activity opportunities and health services for all age groups. Family activity opportunities and child and youth development are particular priorities for the community. This highlights the need to plan for and aim to achieve health related programs and services in addition to the provision of facilities and open space.

As an identified regional centre in the 30-year Plan for Greater Adelaide, the Mount Barker township will need to provide a range of services, administrative functions and recreation and community facilities. Improved services and facilities will benefit the Council population as well as residents in the surrounding councils. A coordinated regional approach to attracting health related services and funding facilities and services should be

adopted. Of particular note is the need for Mount Barker Hospital to increase acute care capacity as population increases, in keeping with the town's status as a regional centre.

**Council's submission:** A proactive approach to the provision of health related programs and services is required (including increasing capacity at the Mount Barker Hospital) and Council seeks integrated partnerships and funding, led by the State Government, to achieve this.

## Culture, Tourism and Sport

### Culture and Tourism

The Mount Barker district has a rich and authentic cultural fabric that is becoming more diverse and dynamic with the influx of new residents and visitors. Council also has a strong and evolving relationship with our First Nations people and see collaboration with the Peramangk as fundamental to future cultural development of the region.

Tourism and hospitality are key industries and major contributors to the regional economy and Council's strategic plan places significant emphasis on growing the tourism sector. In addition to its own activities, Council works closely with Adelaide Hills Tourism as the regional body responsible for growing the tourism sector in the Hills and provides support through an annual contribution.

Key strategies Council is focused on to grow the tourism sector include:

- EP 2.2 Focus on the economic development potential of town centres, activity nodes and main streets
- EP 2.3 Support industry sectors based on the regional strengths of niche agriculture and value adding, eating and drinking, nature based tourism, creative industries and education.
- EP 3.2 Brand and promote the rural hinterland for its heritage towns, landscape quality and environment, farming opportunities and lifestyle.
- EP 4.1 Actively promote and sponsor significant events and activities
- EP 4.2 Encourage diverse accommodation options
- EP 4.3 Facilitate tourism infrastructure and information provision
- EP 4.4 Promote place-based creativity and the arts around the 'hills' experience and landscape
- CW 4.2 Provide space for art and cultural expression including attracting world-class visual and performing arts events

As these strategies are implemented and as the number of people visiting the region increases, there will be an increasing need for infrastructure to support the visitor economy.

The region is environmentally sensitive, which forms part of its appeal, however without the necessary infrastructure there is a risk that the opportunities won't be realised or even, in some situations, there may be a risk of over-tourism impacts.

It is pleasing to see the proposed Heysen Gallery included in the discussion paper. The revitalisation of the main street of Hahndorf is also a high priority for Council as is the need for more accommodation options to support the regional objective of increasing the number of visitor nights in the region. Council is currently seeking funding partnerships for the Hahndorf main street project.

Council currently fully funds the Adelaide Hills Visitor Information Centre located in Hahndorf within the Hahndorf Academy building, one of the busiest in the State. The potential for an expanded, destination VIC has been discussed at the regional level and could be progressed with the support of the State Government.

Finally, connecting visitors to Adelaide and South Australia to the region through excellent visitor information provision at the Adelaide Airport and in the CBD is seen as critical to the continuing success of tourism in the hills as is a first class public transport system.

### **Sport and Leisure - Mount Barker Regional Hub**

To support the growth of the community, Council has made a number of strategic land purchases over the last 10 years, which seeks to address the issue that no open space was provisioned within the 2010 Ministerial rezoning of 1300HA in Mount Barker.

The largest of these sites is the Regional Hub, over 38HA of land that in time will accommodate a range of sporting, recreational, community, accommodation and commercial uses as part of a coordinated and master planned precinct.

Council's strategy with this precinct is to leverage through sale and leasing of land, revenue that enables Council to invest in the significant upfront and on-going costs of providing significant community infrastructure.

Two examples of this infrastructure are the regional sports hub and indoor aquatic and leisure centre.

#### **Regional sports hub**

Council is embarking on a significant greenfield site development to provide regional level Cricket, Australian Rules Football, Football (soccer), Tennis and Netball facilities to address some of the existing and forecast gaps in sports facilities within the region.

Construction of stage 1 is due to commence in Spring 2019 and will include two football (soccer) pitches, a full size senior oval and supporting amenity and change room facilities. This is a significant investment that establishes Mount Barker as the regional home for Cricket, Australian Rules Football and Football (soccer). Future stages will be developed as the population continues to grow, the need for additional facilities arises and as the funding capacity of Council allows.

#### **Mount Barker Regional Indoor Aquatic and Leisure Centre**

Council's existing aquatic facility is over 60 years old and no-longer meets the needs of the community. It fails to meet contemporary standards and expectations and is not an efficient business model, highlighted by its high costs and the fact that it is outdoors and not suited to the hills climate, resulting in relatively low attendance levels.

A new indoor facility is proposed, which will eventually service a catchment of over 100,000 and will be the regional home for aquatics for the Adelaide Hills Region. The facility will include a 25

x 10 lane pool, learn to swim and leisure pool, a warm water therapy pool and provision for future waterslides, expanded leisure facilities and outdoor 50m pool.

Aside from the physical health and safety benefits, a new aquatic facility provides valuable social engagement opportunities for community and is an essential piece of infrastructure, serving a broad cross-section of users, from toddlers through to the elderly.

Council requires the assistance of State and Federal Government to deliver this facility however will take the lead on design, community advocacy and will also seek to partner with the private sector to explore a range of alternative funding avenues.

**Council's submission:**

The State Government should prioritise the development of infrastructure that caters for the cultural wellbeing of the region for its residents and visitors alike. Infrastructure priorities for Mount Barker include cultural facilities such as the Heysen Gallery, the upgrade of the Hahndorf main street, public transport and visitor information.

Sports facilities are essential to regional communities' health, wellbeing and liveability. The provision of capital funding to assist Council to leverage federal funding and peak sporting body contributions is critical to Council's capacity to upgrade and provide new sports facilities for the rapidly growing Mount Barker District Council area. The State Infrastructure Strategy must highlight the importance of funding partnerships with all three levels of government and peak sporting bodies in the delivery of upgraded and new sports facilities to encourage regional growth and prosperity.

## Utilities

Council is concerned about the environmental footprint increasing with population growth. Our ambition is to minimise this footprint as much as possible when it comes to energy and water use and to significantly reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. To this end Council has recently adopted new Environment and Waste to Resources Plans which set the following goals:

- reduce waste to landfill by 20% per capita by 2025
- reduce household mains water consumption by 10% per capita below 2017 levels by 2023
- reduce Greenhouse gas emissions by 3% per year

The leadership shown by the State Government in progressing renewable energy in South Australia is commended and should be continued and increased. At the regional level, Council is working with other partners to progress community energy and to increase the take up of a more resilient and sustainable built form.

### **Economic and Social Development through Recycled Water**

Council has the largest local government run wastewater treatment facility in the State, currently supplying approximately 1.2 GL of recycled water to horticultural and mining activities, the Laratinga Wetlands and parks and gardens.



Substantial new infrastructure is required to enable a full sewer service to be provided to cater for population growth. This involves significant investment in collection mains, treatment processes and recycled water mains.

Funding up front capital investment of such scale is very challenging and carries significant risk. A recent finding is that Council requires financial assistance to cope with these demands (*Sewerage Infrastructure Business Strategy* integran page 7 February 2019).

As the district population continues to increase, the volume of recycled water available will grow significantly. Forecast recycled water supply capacity will increase from 1.6 GL in 2020/21 to over 3.6 GL by 2045/46 and ultimately to just in excess of 4 GL per annum.

Council's objective is to maximise the productive use of recycled water to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits.

Studies undertaken have demonstrated that there is significant potential to expand the current recycled water precinct within the Callington region using the existing council owned recycled water main that runs from Mount Barker to Callington.

This expansion will require significant capital investment in new recycled water storage and augmentation infrastructure.

Council continues to work with a range of key stakeholders that include Regional Development Australia – Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Primary Industries and Regions SA, SA Water, Hillgrove Resources, AGL and a number of privately owned entities that operate large scale businesses such as the growing cherries and apples.

Given the favourable climatic and soil conditions, there is strong interest in developing additional production for export to overseas markets.

The proximity to Monarto is a further advantage of the Callington location, providing the opportunity for cold storage and value adding processing facilities.

The proposed pumped hydro energy storage project as announced by AGL is another exciting opportunity that would require substantial recycled water initially and subsequently in order to replace evaporation loss.

Circular economy initiatives such as these would considerably strengthen the regional economy and provide significant benefits for the community, including growth in the agriculture and horticulture industries with direct new employment (both full-time and seasonal) and flow on jobs in production and processing, including for export markets.

## **Gas**

The proposed provision of reticulated natural gas to the region by Australian Gas Networks has been supported by Council given the possible benefits to business and residents.

Building the pipeline from Murray Bridge to Mount Barker could also have the advantage of supplying other areas such as Monarto South with connection for industrial users.

**Council's submission:** The provision of enabling infrastructure to progressively green utilities must be central to building a sustainable and resilient regional economy.

Council seeks partnerships and support for the necessary infrastructure to grow the circular economy and to reduce the environmental and carbon footprint of the region. The State Infrastructure Strategy should identify and provide clear infrastructure priorities that progress circular economy opportunities.

## **Procurement Strategy**

Council adopted a Strategic Partnerships Policy and has actively encouraged strategic partnering in relation to infrastructure provision and has done so successfully with both private and not for profit entities. Examples of infrastructure delivery include a recycled water pipeline and more recently an indoor sports centre.

Council also acknowledges the benefits of infrastructure procurement being undertaken by the private sector and has successfully partnered with developers on numerous occasions to achieve fit for purpose outcomes with cost savings and value for money for the community.

## **Invitation**

The rapid population growth and the associated approach to infrastructure planning and development make Mount Barker a fascinating case study.

Council would welcome the opportunity to host a visit by Infrastructure SA to enable a first - hand appreciation of the challenges and the innovation that is occurring of necessity in order to seek to keep pace with infrastructure demands.