



More businesses and more jobs in Merri-bek

Merri-bek

Our ask:

Attract and facilitate investment to support business and job growth in Merri-bek by:

- Collaborating with Council to identify vacant and underutilised government owned land and infrastructure that could deliver local economic and community benefits.
- Investing in the supporting infrastructure businesses need to operate efficiently.

In 2021, 19 per cent of Merri-bek's resident workers were employed locally in Merri-bek. This is one of the lowest rates for any municipality in Victoria. The gap between the number of employed residents and the number of local jobs in Merri-bek has been widening for over a decade, increasing by 38 per cent from 2012 to 2022.³⁵

The Victorian Government has earmarked Merri-bek to be home to an additional 70,000 to 80,000 dwellings by 2051 (subject to final Ministerial feedback), a near doubling of the current 70,000 households. The ability to work locally has environmental, social and economic benefits. Increasing local jobs can further recognise these benefits.

Identify vacant and underutilised government land to deliver local economic and community benefits

Vacant and underutilised government land in Merri-bek holds significant potential to unlock hundreds, even thousands, of jobs in Merri-bek.

The transformation of 420 Victoria Street, a government-owned former school in Brunswick, demonstrates the potential for government owned sites to be a key source of jobs. The site and its two former school buildings were run down and partially unoccupiable, operating below optimal potential as a not-for-profit, publicly funded, business incubator. A transformation project involving a 20-year public-private partnership has seen a private sector-lead tenant (BRUDI) invest more than \$3.2 million in the site to substantially renovate the building and unlock previously unusable floorspace, more than doubling the number of jobs on site.

Investing in supporting infrastructure

Investing in rail infrastructure is critical to attracting job-creating investment in Brunswick and Coburg.

Cremorne, a former industrial neighbourhood like Brunswick, has transformed in recent years to become a major tech and jobs hub. In comparison, Brunswick's job growth has been more incremental and less impressive. A key difference between Cremorne and Brunswick is its proximity to six suburban rail lines that can draw a catchment of two to three million people living across greater south-eastern Melbourne, giving Cremorne's employers access to a vast labour pool. In contrast, the Upfield rail line, serving Brunswick, terminates far short of the outer Northern Growth Corridor, and accesses a population catchment of only 300,000 people.

When selecting a business location, large employers look at workforce access. If Merri-bek is to realise its potential as a major employment hub, investment in improved rail infrastructure – including the extension of Upfield rail line to the Craigieburn rail line and Wallan, is critical.

Enabling infrastructure is also critical to supporting job growth. Inadequate and antiquated electrical infrastructure has often limited business investment and economic growth in Merri-bek. In Brunswick and Coburg, old electricity infrastructure can be ill-suited to modern electricity demands driven by increasing use of computers, food production, scientific and other types of machinery, and by electric heating and cooling systems.

Business such as scientific laboratories, creative spaces and distilleries have faced significant time delays and cost barriers when trying to invest and expand. Privately owned grid operators are not financially incentivised to proactively plan for grid enhancement, and upgrade infrastructure subject to demand and payments from businesses in a piecemeal manner. Ultimately, this drives up costs, delaying and discouraging investment, and restricting local economic and employment growth.

Merri-bek advocates for State Government support to better encourage, incentivise and support the upgrade of local electrical infrastructure to meet the critical needs of businesses, with the aim of supporting businesses investment and employment growth in Merri-bek.