



**Merri-bek**  
City Council



**2026 Victorian State Election**

# **Advocacy Priorities**



## Acknowledgement

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek, and pays respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

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# Mayor's Foreword

Merri-bek is a vibrant, diverse and growing community with a clear vision for a city that 'leads and leaves no one behind'; a city that is welcoming, sustainable, engaged and full of life.

As more people call Merri-bek home it is critical that our infrastructure, services and opportunities keep pace with community needs. Local government cannot do this alone. Strong and sustained partnerships with all levels of government are essential to ensuring our community has access to the infrastructure and services it needs, both now and into the future.

Our 2026 Victorian State Election Advocacy Priorities reflect what we hear from our community; their need for improved transport connections, their aspirations for community infrastructure and inclusive services, their wish to live and work in Merri-bek and their concern and care for our environment. These priorities respond directly to the challenges and opportunities we face as a growing city.

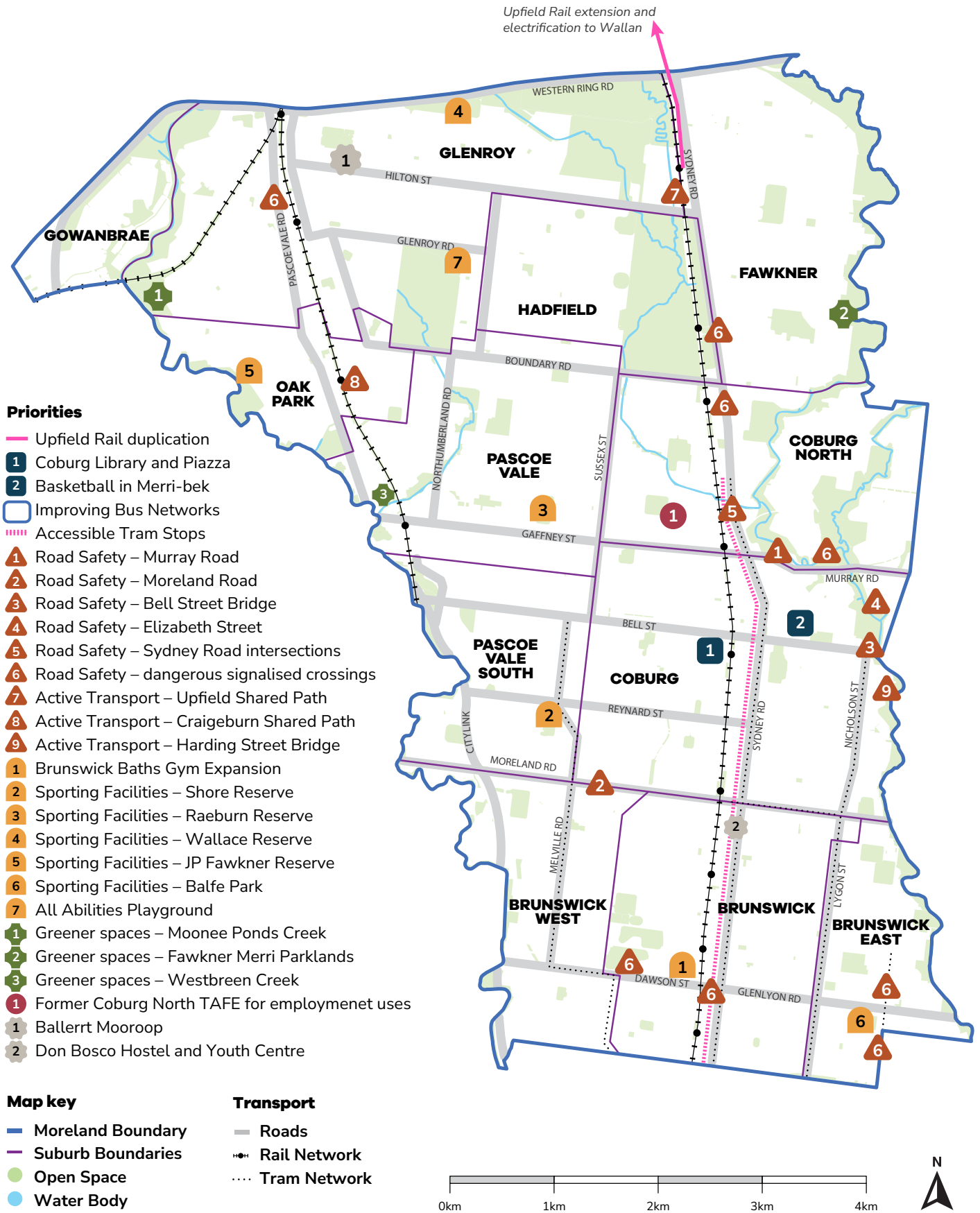
By working in partnership with the Victorian Government, we can deliver better outcomes for our community that support liveability, sustainability and social equity. These investments are critical to ensuring that Merri-bek continues to be a place where people can thrive, regardless of age, background or circumstance.

We look forward to working constructively with the Victorian Government to advance these priorities and to shape a future that reflects our shared commitment to strong, inclusive and sustainable communities.

**Councillor Nat Abboud**  
Mayor of Merri-bek



# Advocacy Priorities Map



# About Merri-bek

The City of Merri-bek spans approximately 51 square kilometres in Melbourne’s inner north. It is strategically located between 4 and 14 kilometres from Melbourne’s CBD and forms part of the gateway to Greater Melbourne’s rapidly growing northern corridor. Our municipality is uniquely positioned to support Victoria’s future economic growth, workforce participation and housing delivery.

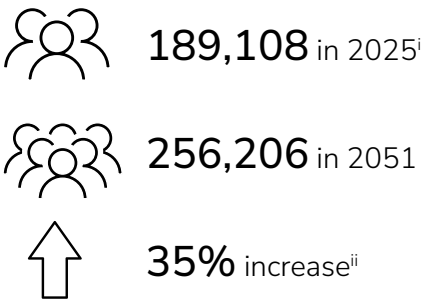
Encompassing Brunswick, Brunswick East, Brunswick West, Coburg, Coburg North, Fawkner, Glenroy, Gowanbrae, Hadfield, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale and Pascoe Vale South, as well as parts of Parkville, Fitzroy North and Tullamarine, Merri-bek connects established inner-city employment precincts with Melbourne’s expanding northern growth areas.

Merri-bek is a diverse and dynamic municipality, home to thriving multicultural communities, major activity centres and vibrant shopping strips. The city’s lively public spaces, rich mix of neighbourhoods and network of parks and open spaces contribute to a high-quality urban environment valued by residents. The city’s proximity to key education, health and employment hubs is attractive to a growing mix of commercial, industrial and innovation-based businesses.

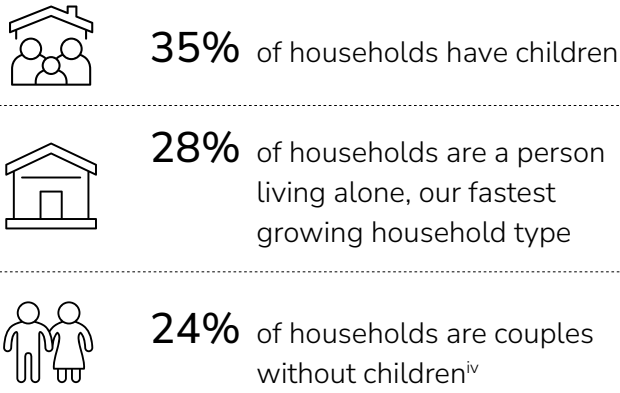
Merri-bek City Council is actively planning for sustainable growth through the expansion of housing, employment, transport, public spaces and community infrastructure.



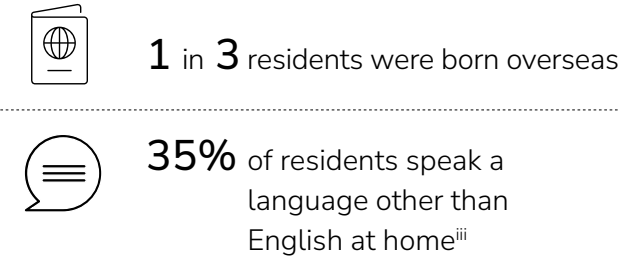
## Our population is growing



## We have many different types of households



## Our community is proudly diverse



## We’re home to businesses, jobs and skilled workers



Largest employer:  
**Health Care and Social Assistance**

Other major jobs generators:  
Construction; Professional Services;  
Retail and Hospitality; Creative Industries & Manufacturing.

i. id community demographic resources (June 2025) City of Merri-bek: community profile, accessed 12 June 2026.  
ii. Quantify Strategic Insights Forecast (2024) Population and housing forecast data.  
iii. id community demographic resources (June 2025) City of Merri-bek: community profile: Ethnicity, accessed 12 June 2026.  
iv. id community demographic resources (June 2025) City of Merri-bek: community profile: Households, accessed 12 June 2026.  
v. id community demographic resources (June 2025) City of Merri-bek: economic profile: Home, accessed 1 September 2026.



Key priority

## Upfield Rail duplication, upgrade, extension and electrification to Wallan

### Merri-bek

#### Our ask:

**Duplicate and upgrade the Upfield rail line, extend (through Roxburgh Park) to the Craigieburn rail line and electrify to Wallan.**

The Upfield rail corridor services the growing populations of Merri-bek and southern Hume and is the gateway to Melbourne's booming northern region in Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell Shire. The Northern Growth Corridor is projected to accommodate 30 per cent of Melbourne's future growth over the coming decades. This region will ultimately be home to more than 1.5 million people.

Key rail investments are needed now to resolve critical constraints on train services in the Merri-bek, Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell municipalities to contribute to unlocking the potential of Melbourne's North, including:

- Duplicating and upgrading the Upfield rail line between Gowrie and Upfield stations to improve train frequency, accessibility, passenger experience and station amenity.
- Re-configuring the City Loop to separate the Upfield and Craigieburn lines to remove ongoing constraints to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers along both lines.
- Extending the Upfield line through Roxburgh Park to the Craigieburn line and electrifying the Upfield line to Wallan with new stations, including at Beveridge and Cloverton, to support the rapidly occurring residential, commercial and industrial development in the region.

#### **Duplication, upgrade and City Loop reconfiguration**

The Victorian Government has earmarked Merri-bek to be home to an additional 70,000 to 80,000 dwellings by 2051 (subject to Ministerial feedback). With Brunswick and Coburg identified as Train and Tram Zone Activity Centres, these suburbs will welcome the bulk of new housing in Merri-bek and the Upfield rail line will be expected to service the increased population. Despite the importance of this corridor to both the current and future residents of

Merri-bek, the Upfield rail line has one of the least frequent peak-period services in Melbourne's rail network, with train services running every 15-20 minutes during peak periods, and every 20-30 minutes outside peak.

Single track service between Gowrie and Upfield stations and the Upfield and Craigieburn train lines sharing City Loop tracks creates significant bottlenecks and constraints to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers.

Duplicating the track between Gowrie and Upfield stations will remove significant bottlenecks and constraints for the length of the Upfield line, allowing for improved, capacity, frequency and reliability.

The Upfield and Craigieburn train lines continuing to share the same City Loop tracks has been identified by Infrastructure Victoria as an ongoing constraint to improved capacity, frequency and reliability for passengers along both lines. A coordinated and timely reconfiguration of the City Loop could also allow for the line to be extended further north to Wallan.

Melbourne Metro 1 removed Sunbury line trains from the current loop, enabling more pathways at North Melbourne Railway Station. Securing these spots for northern group trains could contribute to improved frequency on the Upfield line.

#### **Extension and electrification to Wallan**

In Melbourne's booming northern region, Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell are expanding at rates far beyond forecasts. Mitchell's growth areas alone are expected to reach 80,000 people within 10 years and ultimately will support a population of over 230,000.

The growth communities in Mitchell and Hume including Wallan, Beveridge, Lockerbie, Donnybrook and the future Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre (MAC), are currently serviced by diesel V/line services only as the electric line and metropolitan train services terminate at Craigieburn – this cuts passenger capacity by more than half, as a V/Line train carries about 40 per cent of the passengers of a comparable electric metropolitan train.

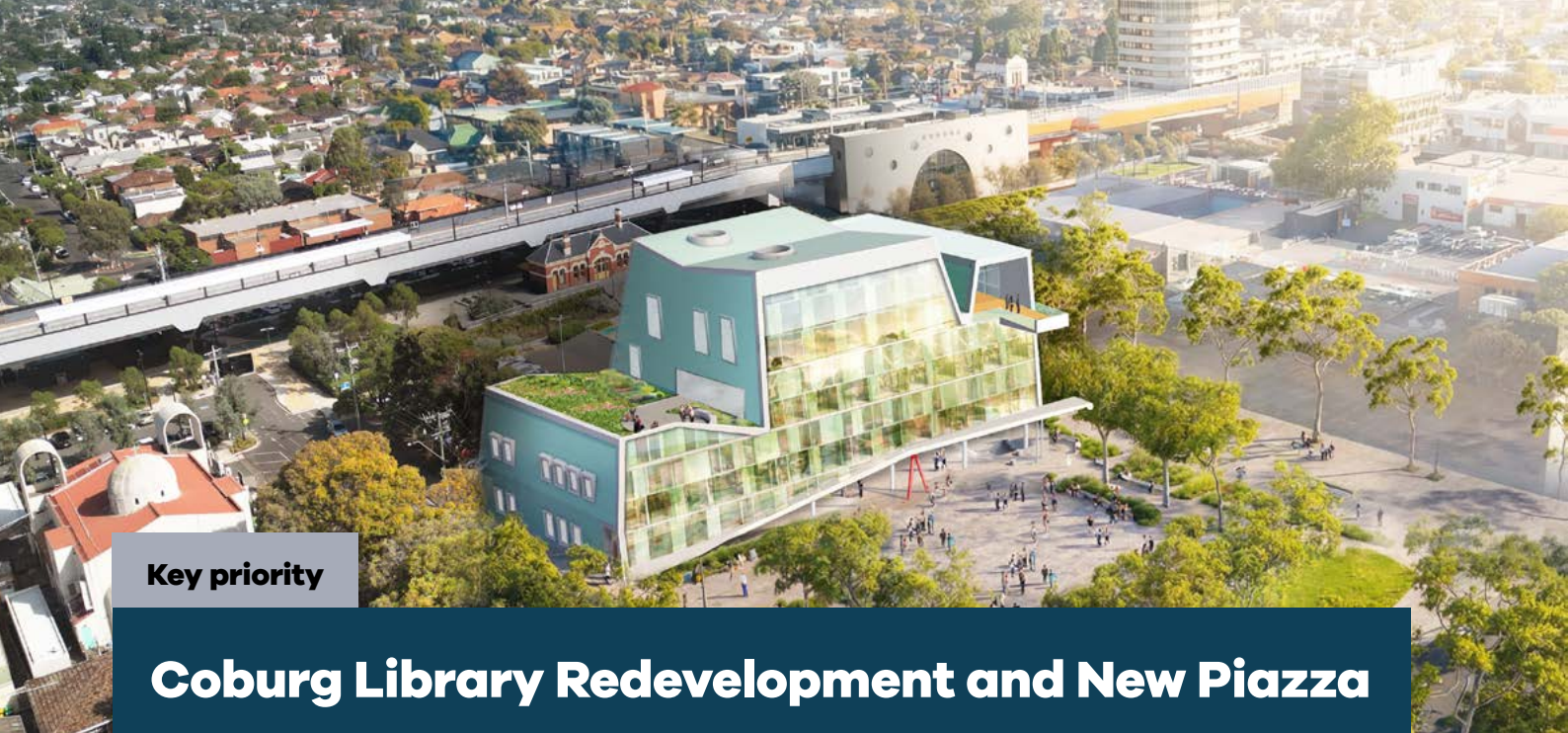
V/line services were expected to reach capacity by 2030, but with higher than forecast growth occurring now, coupled with the State Government's fast-tracking of Precinct Structure Planning, reaching capacity is imminent.

Without an electrified Upfield extension to Wallan the communities of Melbourne's rapidly growing North will become increasingly reliant on the Hume Freeway, one of Australia's most important and heavily used routes. Substantially increased residential and commuter use of the Hume Freeway will have significant adverse impacts on freight movements, bringing Melbourne's principal freight route to a standstill.

#### **Jobs closer to homes**

Merri-bek is home to more than 53,000 jobs, <sup>1</sup> with the majority of these jobs located either side of the Upfield line and Sydney Road. Connecting the 97,000 residents<sup>2</sup> from Roxburgh Park and Craigieburn to the Upfield corridor, along with residents from the burgeoning suburbs of Lockerbie, Donnybrook, Beveridge and Wallan, could create a vibrant and job-rich Sydney Road corridor, providing direct (and more sustainable) access for residents to jobs and education in northern metropolitan Melbourne, a greater pool of workers for businesses in Brunswick and Coburg, and the potential for a significant uplift in retail and hospitality demand along the strip.

Greater connectivity through Melbourne's northern corridor will also support improved access to other major commercial and industrial precincts including Merrifield, the future Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal, and the future Cloverton MAC. The residential development occurring in Mitchell Shire in particular is very unlikely to provide sufficient local jobs for the size of the community and efficient, accessible commuter rail services will be vital to ensure that residents of these communities have equitable access to employment opportunities.



Key priority

## Coburg Library Redevelopment and New Piazza



### Our ask:

Invest \$15 million in the \$60 million redevelopment of Coburg Library and new piazza in central Coburg.

The Coburg Library and piazza will create a major civic hub for a diverse and growing community in the heart of Melbourne's north.

The project will deliver flexible spaces for reading, learning, creative and cultural programs, and community use.

It will become a cultural and social heart for Coburg, helping to strengthen community connections across Merri-bek and beyond.

The project will support higher density living by providing welcoming public spaces beyond the home.

It will also help drive urban renewal and support the revitalisation of Central Coburg.

### Improving liveability

Coburg Library is the busiest and most centrally located of Merri-bek's five libraries.<sup>3</sup>

Merri-bek's population is forecast to grow by 35 percent by 2051. Coburg's population is forecast to grow by 39 over the same period.<sup>4</sup>

The Victorian Government has also identified Merri-bek to be home to an additional 70,000 to 80,000 dwellings by 2051 (subject to Ministerial feedback). Much of this growth will occur in Brunswick and Coburg. This growth will increase demand on Coburg Library and community spaces.

The library and piazza will provide shared places to meet, study, work and socialise. For residents living in smaller homes, these spaces will extend daily life into the public realm. The project will improve liveability for our current and future Coburg community.

### Improving social cohesion

Coburg is known for its diverse and culturally rich community. Generations of residents from a range of backgrounds contribute to the suburb's distinctive identity, vibrant local economy and strong sense of place.

Nearly 30 per cent of Coburg's residents were born overseas. More than 60 per cent have one or both parents born overseas.

The library and piazza will host cultural events, community gatherings and everyday social interaction.

These shared experiences will help strengthen community connection, belonging and social cohesion.

### Revitalising central Coburg and local business

The Coburg Library and Piazza is a cornerstone of Central Coburg's revitalisation. It supports Council's plan for more housing, services, green space and economic activity. The library and piazza will be a catalyst for the revitalisation of Central Coburg.

By creating a high-quality civic destination, the project will create a vibrant precinct that highlights Coburg's unique character. It will unlock redevelopment opportunities across surrounding sites and support growth throughout the activity centre.

The project will attract people and visitors to the town centre. Greater activation during the day and evening will increase passive surveillance, support local businesses and contribute to a stronger sense of community safety.

It will help maximise the value of public and private investment in Central Coburg.

### Ready to deliver

The existing Coburg Library opened in 1983 and is now more than 40 years old. It no longer meets the needs of a growing community.

The design for the library and piazza showcases a contemporary four-storey library building seamlessly connected to a new public piazza. Key elements include:

- A next generation library with flexible reading, learning, creative and community spaces.
- A generous, welcoming and multifunctional piazza with seating, lawn and trees.
- Improved accessibility and stronger connections to transport throughout the area.

Construction is expected to begin in mid-2028, with completion in late 2029. The Coburg Library and Piazza is estimated to cost \$60 million. Council is seeking government partners to help deliver this transformational project.



## Merri-bek

### Our ask:

Invest \$10 million towards a multi-court basketball stadium at Coburg High School that will facilitate education and community use and provide basketball infrastructure to support one of Merri-bek's fastest growing sports.

Basketball is one of the fastest growing team sports in Australia, with 1.3 million people playing the game nationwide. It also ranks as one of the top five most played organised sports among children aged 5 to 14, with over 350,000 regular junior participants. Participation among girls and women has increased by 25 per cent since 2022.<sup>5</sup> Victoria leads the way with 31 per cent of the nation's basketball participants and this number is expected to grow.<sup>6</sup>

The Coburg Basketball Association has over 1,000 junior and senior local competition teams and just under 5,000 participants. Approximately 78 per cent of players are aged under 20. They also have representative teams for juniors and seniors, alternative formats like 3 x 3 competition and community programs such as all abilities, entry-level and holiday programs.

The Coburg Basketball Association uses 22 basketball courts across 18 venues within Merri-bek, Darebin and Hume. Inadequate supply of courts is a challenge. Merri-bek only has seven indoor basketball courts across four locations. Coburg Basketball Stadium was opened in 1968 and has four courts, none of which are compliant with contemporary sporting regulations.

Council completed the Coburg North Sports Hub Masterplan in 2025.

The master plan of the current stadium site identified the significant mismatch of supply and demand for indoor basketball courts. In 2026, Council completed a basketball feasibility study to identify options for more indoor basketball courts in Merri-bek. The study identified the Coburg High School as a preferred option for a new multi-court basketball stadium, with support from the Coburg Basketball Association and Coburg High School.

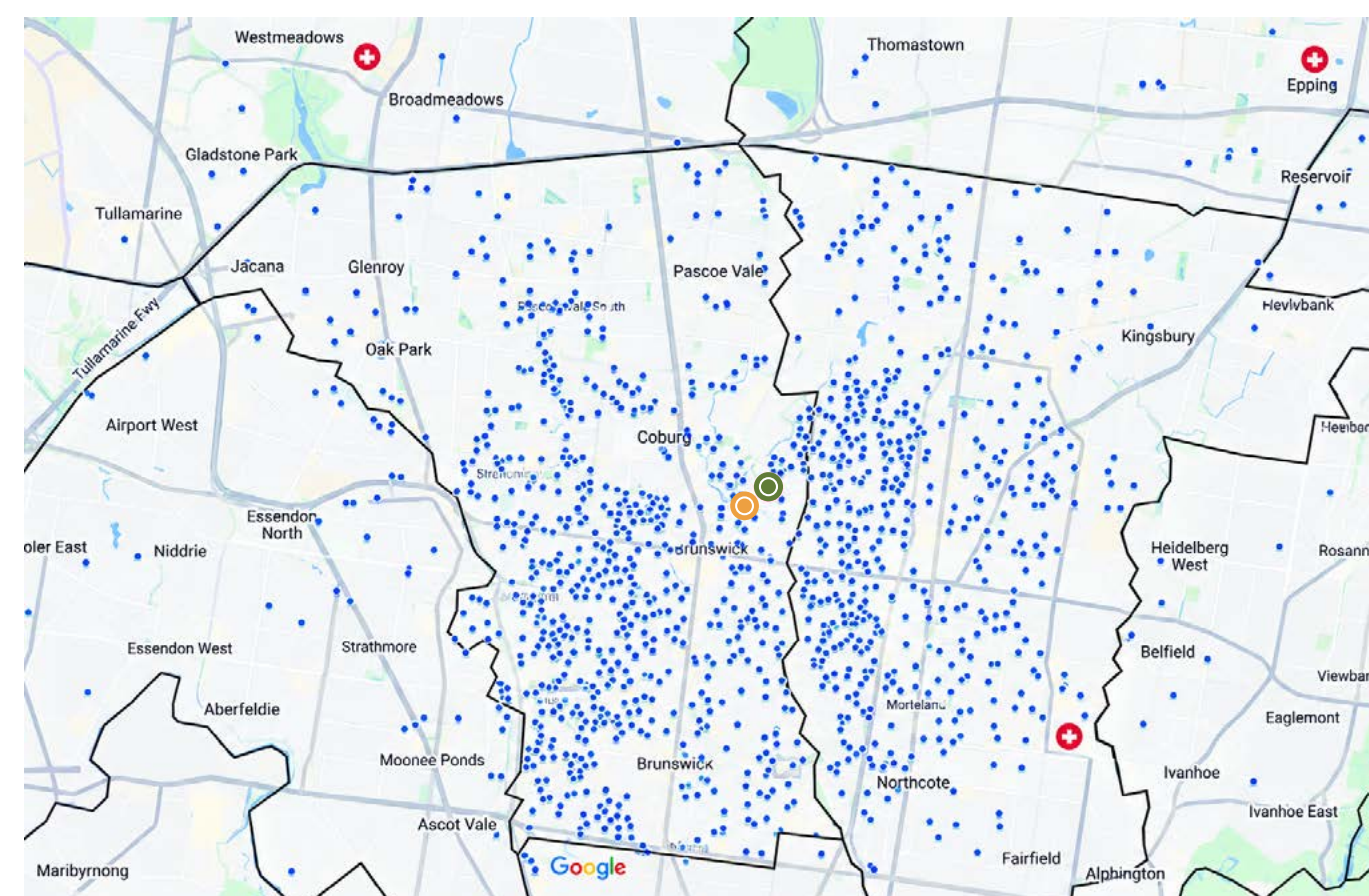
A new stadium at Coburg High School would enable shared school and community use to include education spaces, community spaces, basketball courts and female friendly amenities and gym.

### The local basketball catchment

The mapping of Coburg Basketball Association's participants demonstrates a strong concentration within the immediate catchment of the current Coburg Basketball Stadium.

Coburg High School is located immediately south of the existing Stadium, within the same high-density participant catchment and well positioned to directly serve the established basketball community.

The proposed facility would provide additional court capacity in a location already familiar and accessible to a large proportion of the Association's participants.



Based on 2025 registration data. Blue dots represent Coburg Basketball Association participants (locations are indicative only).

-  Existing Coburg Basketball Stadium
-  Proposed multi-court stadium Coburg High School
-  Existing Victorian basketball association home venues (locations are indicative only)



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## Improving bus networks

### Merri-bek

#### Our ask:

Prioritise the delivery of the Bus Reform project in Melbourne's North including:

- More frequent and improved bus services across Merri-bek, particularly through east-west connections.
- More weeknight and Sunday services on buses in Merri-bek.

Merri-bek residents are renowned for embracing sustainable transport options, including, walking, cycling and public transport; research indicates 83 per cent feel it is important to work towards a future where people use more sustainable transport and 66 per cent of residents claim they are likely to increase their use of sustainable transport in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Yet transport services that fail to meet community needs continue to be a barrier to higher public transport use, particularly in the north of Merri-bek.

A 2023 study into Merri-bek transport found that poor reliability of some forms of public transport, particularly buses, and difficulty travelling east to west or west to east via public transport are major barriers to people using more sustainable modes of transport.<sup>8</sup>

The most frequently reported reasons why participants are currently unable to use a bus more often are that it takes too long and it is not reliable or regular.<sup>9</sup>

Across metropolitan Melbourne, buses on average arrive every 40 minutes on a typical weekday, extending out to 50 minutes on Sundays. Without bus reform, 84 per cent of bus routes will get slower by 2036, limiting Melburnians access to jobs, education and services.<sup>10</sup>

Infrastructure Victoria's research shows that there are immediate ways to make buses more attractive, like fast and frequent services and operating for extended hours of the day.

Higher frequency services provide estimated benefits of around \$1.20 for every dollar invested. Optimising the existing bus network through fast and direct routes with competitive travel times can be achieved for no or very little additional spend.

Extending operating hours to match passenger demand and improving timetable integration to better connect buses to other public transport services like trains can increase passenger numbers. Previous bus reform in Melbourne shows that expanding operating hours can grow patronage by around 10 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

In September 2022, the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) conducted community consultation in Melbourne's northern suburbs to understand the community's aspirations for its local bus network as part of its Bus Network Reform Pilots.

Over 1600 people that live, work or play in Merri-bek, and other surrounding suburbs such as Preston, Thornbury, Northcote, Broadmeadows, Coolaroo and Campbellfield, took part in the survey. They told DTP that they want frequent and reliable buses that travel the most direct route for a faster journey.

In 2026, residents are still waiting for the delivery of the bus reform project in Melbourne's north; the Victorian Government should deliver the Bus Reform project now.



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## Accessible Tram Stops on Sydney Road



### Our ask:

Fund and deliver accessible tram stops along the Sydney Road Route 19 Tram Line by 2030.

Accessible tram stops are critical for the higher number of residents in Merri-bek requiring assistance with core daily activities in comparison to greater Melbourne (6.5 per cent compared with 5.5 per cent respectively).<sup>12</sup>

Accessible tram stops can also deliver wider benefits for the community. They unlock access for seniors and parents with prams and offer safer boarding for all tram users and faster tram travel times.<sup>13</sup>

The *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) required that all tram stops must be fully compliant with the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002* (DSAPT) by 31 December 2022 and it is clear there are many other benefits to accessible tram stops.

Victoria's *infrastructure strategy 2025-2055* has recommended the State Government complete priority public transport stop upgrades to meet legal accessibility requirements and fund further upgrades; it should fund the highest priority stop upgrades and aim to finish them by 2030.<sup>14</sup>

### Improving Sydney Road

Level access stops play an important role in urban renewal and improved economic outcomes for the nearby area. Accessible tram stops can transform the streetscape by widening footpaths, calming traffic and improving safety for all pedestrians – as well as creating spaces for greening, outdoor dining, and other public realm improvements.

Sydney Road is iconic in Melbourne, recognised as the longest shopping strip in the southern hemisphere. However, the community regularly reports dissatisfaction with the overall amenity of Sydney Road. It is a harsh urban environment dominated by cars, has a high vacancy rate of shopfronts, and few trees or other forms of shade. This lack of amenity is having a detrimental impact on local businesses.<sup>15</sup>

In 2023 the Victorian Government's *Melbourne's Tram Plan* outlined a new corridor-based approach for the delivery of accessible stop upgrades based on four broad criteria; accessibility, safety, movement, and place.

The Sydney Road corridor – one of the most heavily used roads for motor vehicles, trams, cyclists and pedestrians in Melbourne – should be a high priority for accessible tram stop upgrades under the framework outlined in *Melbourne's Tram Plan*.

The 2026-27 Victorian State Budget included funding for planning for level access tram stops along Sydney Road in Brunswick and Coburg. Council welcomes the funding and urges the Victorian Government to further commit to the delivery of these upgrades that will be transformational for residents, traders and visitors in Brunswick and Coburg.



## Merri-bek

### Our ask:

Prioritise and invest in road safety for all road users, specifically:

- Take a corridor-based approach to improve safety along Murray Road.
- Deliver safer speed limits and pedestrian operated signals on Moreland Road.
- Fund a feasibility study and designs for safe and accessible active travel over Bell Street Bridge.
- Deliver pedestrian operated signals on Elizabeth Street.
- Deliver ‘Speed on Green’ traffic lights and red turning arrows on dangerous Sydney Road intersections.
- Deliver red-light enforcement cameras or other interventions to improve safety at specific signalised pedestrian crossings in Merri-bek.

A total of 1,974 crashes occurred in Merri-bek in the five years from 2018 to 2023. This included 12 crashes resulting in a fatality, 621 crashes resulting in a hospitalisation, and 1,341 crashes involving other injuries.

Merri-bek has the second highest number of crashes in the inner-Melbourne area (Melbourne 9 local government areas), with only the City of Melbourne being higher. Vulnerable road users are disproportionately affected by crashes on our roads with 600 crashes between 2018 and 2023 involving a pedestrian or cyclist. This represents approximately 30 per cent of all recorded crashes.

Hotspots include Sydney Road, Bell Street, and other arterial roads with vulnerable road users more likely to be injured in a crash at a marked intersection.

Council is also experiencing increased reports of safety issues around schools, particularly concerns around driver behaviour. Prioritising student safety requires the Victorian Government to take a partnership approach with local government, to implement a mix of policing and speed enforcement, upgraded infrastructure including signalised intersections, more school crossing supervisors and community education.

The *Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy* provides a framework for how Council works to create streets where everyone feels safe and reduce the frequency and severity of crashes on our roads. With many roads and intersections in Merri-bek the responsibility of the Victorian Government, Council seeks a collaborative approach with the Department of Transport and Planning to implement safety initiatives in these areas.

The following are key road safety priorities in Merri-bek that will require a partnership approach and funding from the Victorian Government.

### **Murray Road, Coburg**

**Take a corridor-based approach to improve safety along Murray Road and around the Pentridge and Coburg High School areas for pedestrians and cyclists.**

Murray Road is a high-risk arterial road in Merri-bek, with 23 crashes in the last three years, including five serious injury crashes requiring hospitalisation (between Sydney Road and Elizabeth Street). Improved safety on Murray Road is a priority, particularly for the high number of school students walking and riding to school.

### **Moreland Road, Coburg**

**Deliver safer speed limits and pedestrian operated signals near Queen Street to improve safety on Moreland Road.**

Moreland Road is a high-risk arterial road in Merri-bek, with 22 crashes in the last three years, including eight serious injury crashes and one fatality (between Sydney Road and Melville Road).

### **Bell Street Bridge, Coburg**

**Fund a feasibility study and designs for safe and accessible active travel options over Coburg’s Bell Street bridge.**

Pedestrians and bike riders, including a large and growing number of Coburg High School students, are at risk every day on and around Coburg’s Bell Street Bridge.

Bell Street carries more traffic than any other road in Merri-bek, yet pedestrian access on Bell Street Bridge is significantly narrower than other equivalent bridges in the area. In 2021 a Coburg High School student was hit by a car in the risk area.

### **Elizabeth Street, Coburg North**

**Plan and deliver pedestrian operated signals near Goff Street to improve safety on Elizabeth Street, Coburg North.**

There are no safe crossing points across Elizabeth Street between Murray Road and Bell Street. A signalised pedestrian crossing would improve pedestrian and cycling access for students attending Coburg High School. It would also

facilitate east-west cycling movements along a key Strategic Cycling Corridor linking Coburg and Preston Activity Centres.

### **Dangerous Sydney Road intersections, Coburg North**

**Deliver ‘Speed on Green’ traffic lights and red turning arrows on the most dangerous Sydney Road intersections north of Bell Street in Coburg North.**

Sydney Road, north of Bell Street, is a high-speed and high-volume road environment. There is community concern about frequent speeding incidents and non-compliance when pedestrians have a green walking lantern. The installation of speed cameras that operate even when cars have a green signal and red-turn arrows on the main Sydney Road intersections north of Bell Street would improve safety for all road users.

### **Dangerous signalised pedestrian crossings, Merri-bek**

**Deliver red-light enforcement cameras or other interventions to improve safety at specific signalised pedestrian crossings.**

There is community concern about drivers failing to stop at red signals at pedestrian-operated signalised crossings. Crossings of concern include:

- Dawson Street, near Daly Street, and at the Upfield Shared Path Brunswick
- Nicholson Street, near Miller Street, Fitzroy North
- Nicholson Street, near Albert Street, Brunswick East
- Pascoe Vale Road, near Belair Avenue, Glenroy
- Murray Road, near Coburg Olympic Pool, Coburg North
- Sydney Road, near Mathieson Street, Coburg North
- Sydney Road, near Fawkner Train Station, Fawkner

Assessing these crossings and considering red-light camera implementation or other interventions could address the concerning pattern of non-compliance and elevated safety risks for pedestrians.



Beautiful and liveable city

## Active Transport

### Merri-bek

#### Our ask:

Fund, plan and deliver critical missing links in our walking and riding network, including:

- Upfield shared path from Sages Road to the M80 Trail.
- Craigieburn Shared Path from Oak Park to Glenroy.
- Harding Street Bridge, replacing the old wooden bridge over the Merri Creek linking Merri-bek and Darebin.

The Victorian Government is aiming for 25 per cent of all trips to be made by walking or riding by 2030.<sup>16</sup>

In Melbourne, 60 per cent of people's trips are under five kilometres. Many of these trips are well-suited to a short bike ride, but less than two per cent of them are made by bicycle.<sup>17</sup>

In Merri-bek, a recent study found that cycling was the top response when asked what modes of transport people would like to use more often.<sup>18</sup> However by far the biggest barrier for people wanting to cycle more was that it does not feel safe. There is a desire for safer and more cycling-related infrastructure to encourage cycling.<sup>19</sup>

Infrastructure Victoria recently recommended that more protected and connected cycle corridors should be built in Melbourne and regionally.

Critical missing links in Merri-bek's walking and riding network include the Upfield Shared Path from Sages Road to the M80 Trail, the Craigieburn Shared Path from Oak Park to Glenroy and the Harding Street Bridge.

#### **Upfield Shared Path: Sages Road to the M80 Trail**

**Fund, plan and deliver a missing link of the Upfield Shared Path, from Sages Road to the M80 Trail, including a signalised pedestrian crossing at Box Forest Road and shared path along Sages Road.**

The Upfield Shared User Path is one of the most popular bike riding and walking paths in Melbourne attracting around 2,500 users daily.

Transport Victoria are upgrading the Upfield Shared Path between Sages Road and the M80 Trail which will improve connections from Melbourne's north to key active transport routes such as the Merri Creek Trail, Moonee Ponds Creek Trail and the Capital City Trail.

A signalised pedestrian crossing over Box Forest Road - a very busy, high-traffic arterial road - will provide a safer route for bike riders and pedestrians and a shared path along Sages Road will make the entirety of the route safe for all ages and abilities.

#### **Craigieburn Shared Path: Oak Park to Glenroy**

**Fund, plan and deliver a one-kilometre missing link of the Craigieburn Shared Path from Cartwright Street, Oak Park to Glenroy Road, Glenroy.**

The Craigieburn Shared Path is a planned Strategic Cycling Corridor that follows the Craigieburn rail line and, once complete, will provide a safe and convenient recreational and commuter cycling route from Donnybrook Railway Station in the north and connecting to the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail near Bell Street in the south, including bike links to several railway stations.

Funding and delivering the Oak Park to Glenroy section will provide access from the south to the Glenroy Activity Centre, and provide a safe active transport option to a number of schools and kindergartens.

#### **Harding Street Bridge**

**Fund a new Harding Street Bridge over the Merri Creek.**

Merri-bek and Darebin City Councils are working together to design and construct a new bridge over the Merri Creek, replacing an old wooden bridge that has reached end-of-life. This bridge is a vital connection for communities on both sides of the creek, with many students to local primary and secondary schools using the bridge to get to and from school every day. Victorian Government investment in the new bridge would help Merri-bek and Darebin Councils make this vital connection safer, more accessible and more user friendly for pedestrians and bike riders while minimising impacts to the creek and local biodiversity.



Healthy and inclusive communities

# Brunswick Baths Gym Expansion and preparation for Electrification

## Brunswick

### Our ask:

Invest \$8.75 million to expand Brunswick Baths Gym to support its 3,600 members, allow more people to access the facilities as Brunswick’s population grows by 32 per cent by 2051, and prepare for the future electrification of the Baths.

Brunswick Baths Gym is at capacity. Located in the heart of Brunswick, Brunswick Baths offers year-round fitness and swim programs and facilities to the growing local community.

The existing gym building was originally a 1960s school sports hall converted for temporary use in 2012 and then repurposed as a 24-hour gym in 2020 with minimal structural upgrades.

The gym currently has 3,600 members, 11.25 members per square metre. This is more than double the recommended industry benchmark of 5.1 members per square metre.

Brunswick is home to more than 65,000 people and that number is forecast to increase by 32 per cent to more than 83,000 by 2051.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the Victorian Government, in its effort to address housing shortages and affordability, has earmarked Merri-bek to be home to an additional 70,000 to 80,000 dwellings by 2051 (subject to Ministerial feedback). With Brunswick and Coburg identified as Train and Tram Zone Activity Centres, these suburbs will welcome much of the new housing in Merri-bek and even more of the increased population. Demand for gym and fitness facilities in Brunswick will increase.

As more people call Brunswick and Merri-bek home, providing community infrastructure, including a fit-for-purpose Brunswick Baths Gym, is critical to contribute to the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of our current and future community, helping foster healthier and more connected populations.

### Future electrification

Brunswick Baths currently contributes 10 per cent of Council’s corporate gas emissions, primarily from pool heating. Council is actively transitioning its public swimming pools from gas to electric heating as part of its Zero Carbon Merri-bek 2040 framework.

In an inner-suburban facility where ground space is limited, the gym expansion provides an opportunity to integrate space for rooftop heat-pump infrastructure to pave the way for electrification of the Baths in the future.

Engineering assessments have confirmed the former 1960s sports hall is not suitable for future expansion due to the extensive structural work needed to meet current building codes. Strengthening works would be required to support an additional level, even if just housing heat pumps.

Expansion works would also address a range of functionality issues that would improve usage and access including better accessibility and flexible spaces for diverse community to utilise and train such as women’s only and LGBTQIA+ zones.

### New double storey gym

Council has developed a concept and costing report for a new double storey building within the footprint of the existing sports hall. The design offers around 1,200m<sup>2</sup> of floor space including an 845m<sup>2</sup> gym, with a new extended foyer and a cantilever roof over the existing outdoor training zone to allow for year-round use. The design also includes the roofing infrastructure needed to transition from gas to electric in the future.

Construction could take place in 2030.



## Merri-bek

### Our ask:

Invest in upgrades of sporting facilities across Merri-bek to support increasing participation in competition sport and outdoor recreation activities and the health, wellbeing and social benefits sport and physical activity provides.

Merri-bek's sporting grounds are some of the most heavily used public assets in the municipality. Our open spaces and sportsgrounds serve as the primary venues for various organised community and formal sports activities. They also provide open space for informal and recreational sports.

Over the past decade, participation rates in most outdoor recreation activities have risen. This is particularly true in junior and women's teams in competition sport, youth and young adults in social unstructured sport and middle and older adults in informal recreational activities like cycling, running, gym, swimming and dog walking.

Merri-bek's population is forecast to increase by 35 per cent by 2051.<sup>21</sup> Coupled with strong sports participation rates and trends in the municipality, existing sport infrastructure in Merri-bek will not support future growth.

Council has identified several sports grounds in Merri-bek that would benefit from upgrades to enable continued and increased club and community use. Investment in upgraded sporting facilities will benefit organised and informal sport and create a healthier, more

connected and more equitable community.

#### **Shore Reserve Oval, Pascoe Vale South**

**\$2.8 million (Ground Redevelopment: \$2.4 million, Lighting Upgrade: \$400,000)**

- Home to the West Coburg Sporting Club (football and cricket)
- Ground redevelopment will maximise space and include new drainage and irrigation, fencing and coaches' boxes.
- Lighting upgrade will include four-pole lighting design to AFL lighting standards (150 lux).

#### **Raeburn Reserve, Pascoe Vale**

**\$2.8 million Ground Redevelopment**

- Home to the Pascoe Vale Football Club
- Ground redevelopment will include new drainage and irrigation, new turf and coaches' boxes.

#### **Wallace Reserve, Glenroy**

**\$500,000 Precinct Upgrade**

- Home to the Glenroy Lions Football Club and the Moreland Eagles Football Club
- Precinct upgrade will focus on community safety, reduction of rubbish dumping and amenity uplift.

#### **JP Fawkner Reserve East and West, Oak Park**

**\$4.5 million Ground Redevelopment**

- Home to Penola St Francis Moreland Community Sports Club Inc. and the Oak Park Football Club
- Ground redevelopment will include new drainage and irrigation, flood mitigation, new goal posts and new turf to increase ground use of both ovals up to 25+ hours of play per week and new nets on the west ground.

#### **Balfe Park, Brunswick East**

**\$1.1 million Ground Redevelopment**

- Home to Brunswick Zebras Football Club
- Ground redevelopment will include improved drainage, reshaping and levelling the ground to improve safety and ease of use, to ensure the ground can sustain the level of community use.

*Please note: Estimated project costs provided reflect current industry standards.*



Healthy and inclusive communities

## All-Abilities Playground



### Our ask:

Invest \$2 million to provide an All-Abilities Playground at Sewell Reserve, Glenroy.

An All-Abilities Playground at Sewell Reserve in Glenroy will expand Council's recent renewal of the existing play space into a regionally significant all abilities destination. This will support inclusive play, improve access for children and carers with disability, and strengthen Glenroy's role as a community hub.

Inclusive playgrounds deliver community, health and social benefits. Accessible design supports participation by children with diverse physical, intellectual, neurological and sensory needs, while also improving usability for parents, carers and grandparents. All-Abilities Playgrounds also provide a welcoming space for integrated play between disabled and non-disabled children, helping reduce barriers to participation and supporting stronger community cohesion.

An All-Abilities Playground aligns with the Victorian Government's *State Disability Plan 2022–2026* aim to create inclusive communities, including creating more inclusive parks.<sup>22</sup> They remove physical and social barriers, ensuring children of all abilities can play, socialise, and develop alongside their peers.

All-Abilities playgrounds can include a range of different features that make the playground accessible to children with different disabilities. These can include:

- Wider spaces and ramps to give access to wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- Sensory play equipment such as the Little Tikes Braille Panel or Beat Blocks.
- Swings designed to accommodate larger children.
- Wheelchair-accessible trampolines, sandpits and swings.
- Modified slides with ramps for additional support and modified climbing frames for blind/partially sighted children.

- Soft surfaces, appropriate luminance and colour contrasts, textured surfaces to explore with touch, auditory features to make sounds and noises.
- Cosy nooks and quieter zones.

### Sewell Reserve

Sewell Reserve is an established community destination in Glenroy and is home to a range of community facilities including a play space, sporting oval and pavilion, netball courts, a skate park, outdoor gym equipment, a shelter, circuit paths and open space. As a multi-use reserve, it is well suited to expanded inclusive play infrastructure.

Sewell Reserve can accommodate access and parking facilities for families from Merri-bek and surrounding areas.

Merri-bek City Council has recently invested \$837,000 in the renewal of the existing play space. Victorian Government funding will enable delivery of an expanded play space to include a dedicated 'all abilities' area and fully accessible amenities.



Care for nature and climate resilience

# Creating cooler greener spaces and community connections to nature

## Merri-bek

### Our ask:

Invest in priority corridor and parklands projects in Merri-bek that improve biodiversity, urban cooling, stormwater outcomes and community connections with nature.

Victoria's *Climate Change Strategy 2026-30* recognises the need to strengthen our natural environment to protect communities from increasing heat, flooding and climate extremes. Expanding green spaces, planting canopy trees and protecting and enhancing biodiversity will help reduce pollution, combat urban heat and improve climate resilience.<sup>23</sup>

The Victorian Government's *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* also recognises the need to maintain and improve our natural habitats, including waterways, both for habitat and biodiversity conservation and as opportunities for people to enjoy regular contact with nature in urban environments.<sup>24</sup>

Merri-bek is bordered by the Moonee Ponds Creek to the west and the Merri Creek to the east; these waterways and open spaces offer connections to nature close to our dense urban areas. Investment to deliver improvements to our creek corridors can help to cool our neighbourhoods, restore nature, manage stormwater and create healthier, more connected communities.

Council has completed strategic planning for priority creek and parklands projects and seeks Victorian Government investment to deliver cooler, greener spaces for our community.

## Chain of Ponds Moonee Ponds Creek Plan \$2.035 million

The Chain of Ponds Plan and *Chain of Ponds Prospectus 2025-2028* identify priority works along the Moonee Ponds Creek catchment to achieve First Nations cultural uplift, naturalisation, litter and pollution reduction, improved access and social inclusion, and integrated water management. Victorian Government investment would enable delivery of high-priority projects, including planning, wetland construction, habitat restoration, nature trails, public realm improvements and bridge renewal.

## Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan \$5.7 million

The Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan provides a framework to protect and enhance environmental, cultural heritage and community open space values across a 71-hectare corridor in Fawkner and Coburg North. Victorian Government funding would support conservation management, improved walking and cycling connections, rest areas, essential public amenities and low-impact recreation opportunities that increase safe and inclusive use of the parklands.

Delivery of these works will improve access, comfort and amenity while protecting ecological values and supporting healthier, cooler neighbourhoods.

## Westbreen Creek Conservation Plan \$1.4 million

The Westbreen Creek Conservation and Development Plan identifies priority works to protect and enhance environmental, cultural heritage and community open space values along the Westbreen Creek corridor in Pascoe Vale. Priority projects include Austin Crescent Reserve Westbreen Creek Naturalisation and critical flood mitigation works with new pedestrian and cycling link between Westbreen and Moonee Ponds Creeks. Victorian Government funding would support naturalisation, biodiversity outcomes, flood mitigation and improved pedestrian and cycling connections, while balancing recreation needs with the creek's role as a key biodiversity corridor.



Care for nature and climate resilience

## Building healthy and safe homes through better quality design standards

### Merri-bek

#### **Our ask:**

Change the Victorian Planning Provisions to strengthen resilient and sustainable design standards for residential development. This will improve climate resilience and ensure future homes are healthy, safe and affordable to live in. Specifically:

- Improve passive design requirements, including shading to all North, East and West facing windows, natural ventilation for all habitable rooms and adequate daylight levels through science backed standards.
- Limit dark roof materials, improve guidance on tree canopy standards and further strengthen Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) outcomes.
- Require climate risk assessments for all development, based on the latest climate data and supported by digital planning tools.
- Ensure that state policies meet or exceed previous local ESD policy requirements.

In the face of rising energy costs and a warming climate, the need for thermally comfortable, energy efficient and well-designed homes is more pressing than ever. Designing and building homes with Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) principles, can deliver simple, low-cost measures that reduce community vulnerability to heatwaves. Building with ESD principles at the outset can also avoid expensive upgrades later and create homes that are healthy and affordable to live in.

The Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE), represents 42 Victorian councils covering approximately 80 per cent of Victoria's population. CASEBE are calling on the Victorian Government to embed simple, statewide rules that ensure every new building is future-proofed against climate extremes with design standards that cut energy bills, protect households from heatwaves and flooding, and give industry the certainty it needs. This means every new home and building is affordable to live in, healthy and climate-ready from day one.

Many existing buildings, particularly apartment buildings, are not ready to withstand current and growing climate-related pressures. Australian building standards lag behind international best practice for sustainability and climate resilience.

According to an Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report, less than five per cent of newer apartment buildings meet minimum sustainability standards, with many older apartment buildings falling well short.<sup>25</sup>

University of Melbourne research released in 2017 showed that if a heatwave hit and the power blacked out, most apartment buildings would bake, with indoor temperatures quickly exceeding international health standards.<sup>26</sup>

Simple, low-cost measures such as window shading to the west and east facing windows of a building, ensuring natural ventilation for all habitable rooms, adequate daylight levels and limiting dark roof materials can make real and positive impacts to the comfort and safety of a building.

However, since the Victorian Government's recent planning reform, development applications are no longer required to include simple resilience measures. The quality and resilience of homes being approved is being reduced.

Like many municipalities across Victoria and Australia, parts of Merri-bek are facing significant challenges from heat vulnerability, significant tree canopy loss and impacts from increased urban heat. As extreme heat events are more frequent, passive cooling and thermal performance in new housing determines whether homes stay safe during heatwaves. Better quality design up front can be simple – resulting in homes that are healthy, safe and affordable to live in.



**Thriving economy and culture**

## More businesses and more jobs in Merri-bek

### Merri-bek

#### Our ask:

Ensure Merri-bek is a place where people can live and work by supporting business investment, protecting employment land and delivering the infrastructure needed for jobs growth.

- Review the Victorian Government's industrial land use planning strategies to ensure sufficient employment land, business activity and jobs are retained and created alongside the State's housing growth and Activity Centre reforms.
- Commit to ensuring the former Coburg North TAFE site is used for employment-generating uses that create local jobs and support Merri-bek's growing population.
- Prioritise investment in transport infrastructure and services in Merri-bek that connect businesses to workers, customers and suppliers, including duplicating, extending and electrifying the Upfield rail line and delivering the Bus Reform project in Melbourne's North.

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.<sup>27</sup>

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). The ability to work locally has environmental, social and economic benefits. Increasing local jobs can further recognise these benefits.

Merri-bek is uniquely positioned to support jobs growth and investment. The municipality sits on major transport corridors and provides strong connections to Melbourne Airport, western Melbourne's industrial precincts and the Parkville Precinct (Australia's largest and most renowned biomedical and life sciences cluster). It is also home to a thriving multicultural small business community, a growing creative industries sector and a highly skilled workforce. RMIT's Brunswick campus, including its globally renowned School of Fashion and Textiles, further strengthens Merri-bek's creative and innovation economy. The campus helps anchor the Brunswick Design District, supports businesses along Sydney Road and drives innovation in sustainable and circular textile manufacturing.

#### **Review land use planning strategies**

A review of the Victorian Government's industrial land use planning strategies alongside housing growth and Activity Centre reforms can ensure employment opportunities are not displaced as Merri-bek, and other municipalities, grow. Protecting and enhancing employment land is critical to supporting local businesses, attracting investment and creating jobs closer to where people live. Preserving well-located industrial and commercial precincts will help address Merri-bek's longstanding shortage of local employment opportunities and ensure that jobs growth occurs alongside housing growth. A balanced approach will strengthen the local economy and reduce the need for long-distance commuting.

#### **Use the former Coburg North TAFE site for employment-generating uses**

The former Coburg North TAFE site represents an opportunity for the Victorian Government to deliver long-term economic benefits alongside housing growth in Melbourne's north. Future redevelopment of the site should reinforce employment-generating uses that support a diverse range of industries, attract private investment and create sustainable local jobs. Located in the Coburg North Employment Precinct, redeveloping the former Coburg North TAFE site for commercial, innovation, education or light industrial purposes would help address Merri-bek's longstanding shortage of local employment opportunities while supporting the economic needs of a rapidly growing population. Ensuring the site remains a place of work, enterprise and skills development will strengthen the municipality's economy and contribute to a more balanced and sustainable city.

#### **Investing in supporting infrastructure**

Investing in rail infrastructure is critical to attracting job-creating investment in Merri-bek.

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.

Equally important is investment in Melbourne's bus network, including delivery of the Bus Reform project in Melbourne's north. Frequent, reliable and better-connected bus services would improve access to employment precincts, activity centres and industrial areas,. This would help businesses connect with a larger workforce while providing residents with more opportunities to access jobs closer to home.

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 – and better bus services is critical.



Engaging and responsible council

## Ballerrt Mooroop

### Glenroy

#### Our ask:

Invest in the development of the first Aboriginal Gathering Place in Northwest Metropolitan Melbourne, led by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

The Ballerrt Mooroop site, located on Hilton Street in Glenroy, holds significant cultural and historical value to the local First Peoples community. It is home to a spiritual healing tree and sacred ceremonial grounds, and was previously the site of Ballerrt Mooroop College, one of four Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) schools to operate in Victoria.

In December 2025, the Victorian Government announced that the Ballerrt Mooroop land title will be returned to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, recognising the Wurundjeri community’s aspirations for self-determined community, economic and social outcomes.

Wurundjeri Elders, supported by community, have identified the establishment of a Wurundjeri-operated Aboriginal Gathering Place as the priority activation of the site to support cultural practice and knowledge transfer, create pathways for employment and training, strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes, and provide culturally safe space for Wurundjeri people and the broader First Peoples community across Merri-bek and Hume.

Wurundjeri Elders invite interest and engagement from the broader community and local, State and Federal Governments to support the development of Ballerrt Mooroop as a Wurundjeri-led Aboriginal Gathering Place. Investment in the site will progress Victoria’s statewide Treaty commitments to transfer decision-making power and resources to Traditional Owners to make decisions about the matters that affect their lives.

As a community-controlled initiative, Ballerrt Mooroop will align its operations and programming with traditional knowledge sharing and healing Country. Profits will be reinvested into targeted, closed programming that support the social and emotional wellbeing of Wurundjeri and the local First Peoples community.

Ballerrt Mooroop will also embrace reconciliation, social cohesion and stronger people to-people relationships with the local non-Indigenous community, through expanded Wurundjeri-led education programs, events and activities that promote truth-telling and cultural understanding in Merri-bek and Hume.

In 2021 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Merri-bek and Hume was almost 3,000. From 2016 to 2021, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population increased by 30 per cent in these two municipalities, where the average annual population change over the period was 5.4 per cent. This catchment also includes 65 schools, 24 Early Learning Centres with bush kinder grants and the First Peoples North Metro Network.

Nearly half of the First Peoples community in Merri-bek and Hume are under the age of 25, and it is expected that in the coming decades, this community will grow not only numerically but also proportionately in the region. Existing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in Merri-bek and Hume provide services for Elders and an ageing population, although with the large proportion of the First Peoples population under 25, there is a gap in delivery of services, supports and programs locally.

Wurundjeri’s Gathering Place provides a strong opportunity for State and Federal Government to demonstrate their commitment to self-determination and reconciliation by enabling the development of Ballerrt Mooroop as a place that meets the needs of the Wurundjeri community, local First Peoples and non-Indigenous communities in the cities of Merri-bek and Hume.



Engaging and responsible council

Mental Health

Engaging and responsible council

Family violence prevention

Coburg

Our ask:

Fund and deliver a Mental Health and Wellbeing Local in Coburg.

Planning funding for 20 Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals, including one in Coburg, was announced by the Victorian Government in 2022 and was funded in the 2023/24 State Budget. Funding and delivering the Coburg Mental Health and Wellbeing Local will provide an accessible and local service for people in Melbourne’s north that will reduce travel, waiting and referral barriers.

Significant mental health challenges face the community, with more than one in four adults experiencing anxiety or depression. In Merri-bek, mental health conditions are the most commonly reported long-term health condition. According to 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, 11 per cent of residents reported living with a mental health condition, compared with the Victorian average of 8.1 per cent.

Mental health promotion and early intervention is critical to preventing the onset and escalation of common mental health conditions. Merri-bek City Council, in partnership with local service providers, community organisations and regional networks, plays a key role in delivering place-based responses that support community wellbeing.

This includes a broad suite of initiatives such as family violence prevention, youth engagement programs, Maternal and Child Health services, community development and social connection programs, advisory committees that elevate lived experience, and arts and cultural initiatives that foster belonging and inclusion.

Merri-bek

Our Ask:

Invest in place-based partnerships between councils, health services, schools, sporting clubs, neighbourhood houses and community organisations.

Establish ongoing, recurrent funding for all councils to support primary health and community organisations to undertake primary prevention of family violence, rather than relying on competitive grant rounds.

Council recognises the significant impacts of family violence on individuals, families and communities, including the harm caused to children and young people, and the ongoing pressure this places on local services and support systems. In 2024-2025 around 1,900 incidents of family violence were recorded in Merri-bek.

Council’s 2019 Gender Equality Commitment guides local actions to address and prevent family violence in the community and promotes a culture of safety and respect, including through participation in the annual 16 Days campaign and collaborations with community partners, such as early years, sports and recreation, youth education and culturally diverse communities.

Council supports those at risk of or experiencing family violence through convening the Merri-bek FV Network and joint advocacy for housing, resources, funding and cultural change to create safe spaces for all gender identities and their children to escape violence.



Engaging and responsible council

## Social, affordable and public housing

### Merri-bek

#### Our Ask:

Commit through Homes Victoria, Development Victoria and the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance to deliver at least 1,000 new social homes in Merri-bek by 2036.

Renew ageing public housing sites in Coburg North, Glenroy and Brunswick West.

In 2025, an estimated 6,873 households in Merri-bek needed affordable housing to avoid housing stress. If current conditions continue, this figure will grow to over 9,100 households by 2051. More than half of this need — 4,725 households — is among very low-income households and people experiencing homelessness, whose capacity to pay market rent is severely constrained.

Only 2.7 per cent of homes in Merri-bek are public or community housing – far below what is needed as families wait for many years on a growing waiting list.

A minimum commitment of 1000 public and community (social) housing dwellings would transform many lives for the better.

Central Coburg is ideal to deliver the social and affordable housing our community needs. It is connected to train, tram and bus services, fresh food and groceries, schools, jobs, parks and leisure facilities. These are the essentials that make affordable housing work for people on low incomes.

Council owns 45,000 square metres of land between Bell Street, Munro Street and Harding Street and has a Framework Plan for more than 1,000 homes, new parks, commercial and retail space, multi-deck public parking and major public realm improvements. Council has committed to 23–30 per cent social and affordable housing. This commitment will only become real with support from other levels of government, developers and housing providers.

A comprehensive program to renew ageing social housing properties is also required to prevent a two-tier system where newer social housing is of a high standard while older housing continues to deteriorate.



Engaging and responsible council

## Helping people experiencing homelessness

### Merri-bek

#### Our Ask:

Invest \$500,000 per annum in Merri-bek's Assertive Outreach program.

During the 2021 calendar year, VincentCare recorded 264 people sleeping rough in Merri-bek. Since 2021, demand for homelessness and material aid support has increased, putting unprecedented pressure on local services.

In 2024, Council launched Merri-bek Zero, coordinating local services to improve housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, aiming for homelessness to be rare, brief and non-recurring. Council funds an Assertive Outreach service, providing enhanced access to specialist homelessness and other critical support services for rough sleepers. Assertive Outreach is now an essential part of the local homelessness support system.

The demand on the service has outstripped the resources available and outreach workers are having to choose between supporting new rough sleepers and providing casework to existing rough sleepers. Referral volumes increased 33 per cent from 2024 to 2025. In the first half of 2026 alone, the service received 70 new referrals of rough sleepers from residents, local businesses, sports clubs and service providers.

Council does not have capacity to expand the program to meet the need and cannot sustain the level of funding into the future.

Victorian Government investment is essential to secure this service into the future, ensuring Merri-bek's rough sleepers can gain early access to support, preventing further entrenchment and more easily embark on the pathway to housing and rebuilding their lives.



Engaging and responsible council

## Continuing services at Brunswick's Don Bosco Hostel and Youth Centre

Engaging and responsible council

## Gambling harm prevention reform

### Brunswick

#### Our Ask:

Explore funding options to support the continued delivery of programs for children and young people from the Don Bosco Hostel and Youth Centre.

Using Development Victoria expertise, identify practical opportunities to retain a community youth facility on the site through precinct planning, development feasibility, partnership models, community infrastructure outcomes, and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

The Catholic Church's Salesian Society has determined that the Don Bosco Hostel and Youth Centre, which has been in operation for 87 years, is underutilised and surplus to its requirements. It is closing services and offering the Sydney Road Brunswick site for sale.

The Don Bosco Hostel and Youth Centre has served children, young people and families in Brunswick and beyond since 1939. The Centre provides a 30-room hostel for young men aged 18 to 24 and a popular Youth Centre offering free or low-cost after-school, weekend and school holiday programs, including recreation activities and accessible spaces for families and young people.

The Don Bosco Hostel and Youth Centre is highly valued by the local community. Its services and programs make a significant contribution to the wellbeing, inclusion and connection of generations of children, young people and families. Its loss would be felt particularly by young people and families who rely on affordable, accessible and welcoming community-based programs.

Council is calling for the Victorian Government to work directly with the Salesians to explore whether existing or future funding streams, partnership arrangements or precinct-based solutions could help secure the site's ongoing community benefit.

### Merri-bek

#### Our Ask:

Commit to the rolling out of further gambling reforms, including:

- expanding gaming venue closure hours
- lowering daily EFTPOS withdrawal limits at gaming venues, and
- extinguishing all forfeited electronic gaming machine (EGM) licences.

State Government research found that the financial impact of gambling on Victorians has doubled over the past decade, reaching a total of \$14.1 billion in 2023.<sup>28</sup> Data on annual player losses for 2024–2025 indicates that electronic gambling machines account for the largest share (43%), followed by wagering and online betting on sports and racing (33%).<sup>29</sup> In 2024–25, Victorians lost over \$3.1 billion on electronic gaming machines. In Merri-bek there are currently 639 poker machines, which took more than \$64 million losses from our community in 2024–2025.

Around 330,000 Victorians experience gambling harm each year and these financial losses contribute to significant social costs including financial distress, mental health impacts and relationship harm.

The existing regulatory framework is not adequately addressing the significant social harm experienced by the community. Council urges the Victorian Government to prioritise gambling harm prevention within the State's Gambling Regulations.



Engaging and responsible council

## Social cohesion and racism

### Merri-bek

#### Our Ask:

Establish a statewide Community Cohesion Action Fund for grassroots initiatives.

Make the Local Anti-Racism Initiatives Grants Program an ongoing, recurrent funding stream with minimum annual funding of \$2.5 million, grants up to \$150,000 per project and multi-year funding options to sustain local partnerships.

Council recognises the harmful impacts of racism and discrimination for individuals and communities, and in undermining social cohesion. Merri-bek's Human rights Policy and Social Cohesion Plan provide the framework for Council's commitment to advancing inclusion, belonging and anti-racism and to promoting a respectful, equitable and culturally diverse community where all people can participate and thrive.

Australia's National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF), released by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2024, provides a vital 10-year roadmap with 63 recommendations to eliminate racism through coordinated action in law, health, education, and workplaces. Yet, without government endorsement or funding, implementation remains stalled. This is occurring amid surging racism, including rising abuse against First Nations Peoples, antisemitic attacks, Islamophobia, anti-Arab/Palestinian incidents, anti-immigration rallies in major Australian cities and rising racism targeting people of Indian heritage.

Merri-bek also supports place-based action through the Hume Merri-bek Anti-Racism Network and local initiatives such as the Merri-bek Democracy Lab, which builds civic awareness and stronger social ties through trusted community relationships. Council provides the venues and local networks where cohesion is built, including libraries, hubs, neighbourhood houses and community events, but this work is often funded through short-term grants that end before partnerships can be sustained.



Engaging and responsible council

## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and Aromantic communities (LGBTIQA+)

### Merri-bek

#### Our Ask:

Ensure anti-discrimination and anti-vilification legislation are being effectively enforced to protect transgender and gender diverse people across all settings and services.

Merri-bek has a large and diverse LGBTIQA+ population. Council is committed to working with our LGBTIQA+ communities through both our Human Rights Policy and LGBTIQA+ Action Plan to amplify the voices and advocate for our LGBTIQA+ population.

Council encourages Victorian government to continue to support LGBTIQA+ programs, strategies and plans, including activities associated with the Pride in our Future Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-32. We encourage the government to maintain its support for Safe Schools, to ensure our school communities are safe and inclusive for all.

Merri-bek is concerned by an increase in violence and discrimination directed at LGBTIQA+ people in public places and urge the Victorian government to work collaboratively with local LGBTIQA+ organisations, leaders and communities to ensure our communities are safe and free from violence.

Council remains concerned about the increasing barriers facing our transgender and gender diverse population. This has seen a rise in discrimination, violence and vilification directed towards transgender and gender diverse people in health settings, the public domain, employment and education. Merri-bek calls on the state government to ensure anti-discrimination and anti-vilification legislation are being effectively enforced to protect transgender and gender diverse people across all settings and services.

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