ERG EASTERN REGION GROUP OF COUNCILS

Strategic Plan

2025 - 2029

Knox City Council

MANNINGHAM

Maroondah City Council

WHITEHORSE CITY COUNCIL

Yarra Ranges Council

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Indigenous acknowledgement

The ERG recognises the Traditional Owners of the land we call the eastern region. We acknowledge their rich cultural heritage and spiritual connection to the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and value their ongoing contribution to the cultural heritage of the region.

Background & context

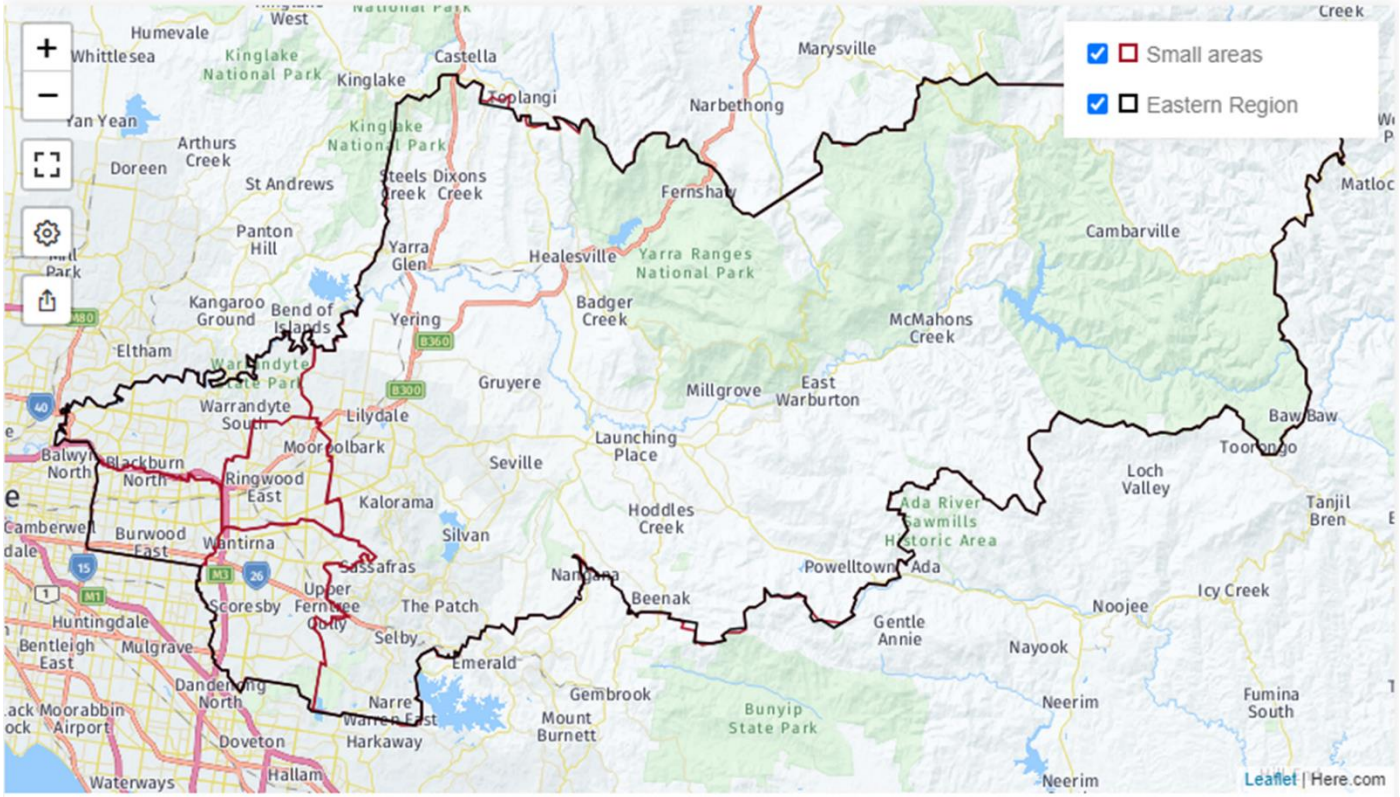
Who we are

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

The eastern region is the traditional home of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

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

The region extends from 15 kilometres to Melbourne's CBD eastwards into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It is a major population centre with a significant industry base. Specialisations are in advanced manufacturing, wholesale /distribution, health services, education (including Universities and TAFE institutes), as well as retail, tourism, and other service industries. The area includes the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre, Ringwood Metropolitan Activity Centre, the Bayswater Business Precinct, and major education and health services.



Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions).

Residents enjoy a choice of health and recreation facilities, local and regional shopping destinations, access to leading schools and tertiary institutions, and some of Victoria's best recreational areas. The region functions as Melbourne's lungs, with extensive green wedge and natural areas, mature canopy trees and is Melbourne's primary water catchment.

Recent State Government commitments to housing growth seek a 71 per cent increase in housing by 2050. Without a commitment to ensure community infrastructure keeps pace with growth existing levels of amenity will be impacted.

The region's economy is significant, hosting 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs and generating over $49 billion Gross Regional Product. While the manufacturing sector is of greatest value it is not the largest employer. The top five employing industries are health care & social assistance, retail trade, education & training, manufacturing, and construction.

Total population

746.067

(Approximately 14% of Greater Melbourne's total)

Total Land areas (hectares)

282,120

(28% of Greater Melbourne's 999,251 hectares)

Gross regional product ($M)

$49,478

(Approximately 11% of Greater Melbourne's total)

What we do

'Our vision is for the region to be connected, healthy, sustainable and prosperous, supported by financially secure, high performing councils.'

To achieve our vision the ERG will:

- be a catalyst for collaboration and trusted voice on regionally significant matters
- work to create an enabling operating environment
- support councils to be more efficient and effective
- advocate and plan to improve access to infrastructure and services across the region

To be successful we focus on:

- activities that benefit all ERG councils and reduce duplication
- projects that have active support and are achievable
- avoiding competing interests and tensions
- strong engagement and building productive working relationships critical to our success
- good governance and management of ERG resources

How we work:

Collaboration and partnerships are critical to how we work. Our collective concerns are informed both by their impacts and by our ability to impact change and achieve shared outcomes

Many external factors impact on the region, others involve shared responsibilities, and many are often beyond local government's direct control.

Our responses range from awareness raising to direct action in support of our vision and four pillars. Our Strategic Plan is implemented through a focussed number of regional actions that consider the following criteria:

- is it a big issue for the region (impacting and/or benefitting all councils)?
- will our action lead to better community outcomes?
- is it achievable – will we make a difference?
- will we create shared value for ERG councils?
- will we reduce duplication / competition?

What's important to us

The ERG councils have more in common than what sets the group apart. Through extensive community engagement, Councils identified what is most important to their communities, and together for the region. These are grouped into four areas, or pillars: People, Places, Economy, and Environment and a longer-term regional outcome and key stakeholders have been identified for each.

People

PEOPLE

Resilient, cohesive communities who enjoy an improving quality of life, great access to services and better health and wellbeing.

- Eastern Health
- Eastern Volunteers
- Eastern Access Community Health (EACH)
- Eastern Affordable Housing Alliance (EAHA); Homelessness & Social Housing Charter Group
- VicHealth and Departments including Education; Health; Families, Fairness & Housing; Emergency Management Victoria

Improving community health and wellbeing is central to diverse, inclusive and cohesive communities, better able to withstand major shocks and stresses. Equity of access to opportunity and addressing hardship and disadvantage builds social cohesion and increases community safety, while improving employment and life outcomes.

Increasing rates of crime, particularly family violence remains a complex issue for all levels of government. A more strategic, regional response for community safety is needed, and to address underlying causal factors such as access to secure and affordable housing, education and employment.

Rapid population growth is the biggest challenge facing ERG councils in their efforts to support communities. It will directly impact communities' ability to access the services and community infrastructure they depend on. The perception of government that the region can simply absorb and accommodate growth without the focussed funding support available to Melbourne's growth areas will compound these impacts.

Opportunities in the region exist to share council services to make them more efficient and effective. This may relate to internal council functions or to service areas such as immunisation, school crossing supervisors, animal management, environmental health, parks and gardens to regional library administration.

Places

PLACES

Great places that foster social cohesion, equality of opportunity, are resource efficient and healthy, in a region that's easy to get around by active or public transport for short distances.

- Infrastructure Victoria
- Department of Transport and Planning
- Transport advocacy groups such as Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF), Bicycle Victoria (BV), Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC)
- Eastern Region Trails Working Group (ERTWG)
- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA)
- Planning and development industry peaks (PIA, PCV, UDIA, etc.)
- Council Alliance for Sustainable Built Environments (CASBE)

Population growth increases demands on public spaces and facilities and changes how we move around. Active centres build neighbourhoods and support economic, social and cultural activities. Vibrant activity centres are essential for high amenity neighbourhoods and to achieve living locally. Housing targets set by the State Government in *Plan for Victoria* require ERG Councils to plan for an additional 212,500 dwellings by 2050, an increase of 71 per cent on existing dwelling stock. This has significant implications for community infrastructure that will either need to be newly provided or

upgraded to meet future demand. Collaboration is required to clearly communicate these community infrastructure needs to State Government and ensure that they are provided for in key locations in the region.

Transport connections across the region have not kept pace with needs, and increasing congestion has made travel to jobs and services more difficult. There are opportunities for advocacy and collaborative integrated transport planning with State Government; to review and invest in bus services; and for other practical and cost-effective improvements that support people to access work, study and services. Other opportunities for joint procurement, integrated planning, and for shared services exist around asset management and to leverage regional strengths and knowledge through centres of excellence.

Economy

ECONOMY

Local employment opportunities support a diverse and adaptable workforce who enjoy a connected, competitive, and prosperous future.

- Melbourne's East Regional Economic Development Group (MEREDG)
- North-East Local Jobs & Skills Taskforce
- Economic Growth Victoria
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENS)
- Secondary and Tertiary education sectors
- Industry groups such as SEMMA and NORTH Link

The region's economy is significant and diverse and enjoys well-developed infrastructure and access to a highly skilled workforce. In our activity centres and across specialised activity clusters are 11 per cent of Greater Melbourne's jobs that contribute around $50 billion in Gross Regional Product (GRP). A growing number and diversity of local jobs and businesses are needed to sustain local communities and support a high quality of life. While regional employment has grown, the number of positions advertised online has decreased nearly 50 per cent since the peak of 10,489 in July 2022.

Opportunities exist around a shared vision and effective collaboration for increasing local employment in activity centres, business precincts such as Bayswater, and to support key sectors such as tourism and agriculture in the outer east. Leveraging State Government precinct planning could result in better local employment outcomes. Resource conservation and climate action can also stimulate uptake of new technologies and create new industries and jobs.

Environment

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental stewardship with spaces for people and nature, where regional responses support sustainability and climate resilience.

- Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (EAGA)
- Sustainability Victoria
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
- Melbourne Water
- Integrated Water Management Forum
- Eastern Region Trails Working Group
- Recycling Victoria; Sustainability Victoria; Tourism Victoria

Globally there is significant concern about the future of the planet and the need to address climate change and resource consumption for sustainable living. Human activity is leading to a hotter, drier climate with more extreme weather events causing fires, floods and landslides. Access to clean air, water and to nature are central to health and wellbeing.

While the region is known for its extensive parks and leafy suburbs, redressing the fastest rate of tree canopy loss in Melbourne will be more challenging with growth. Linking open spaces across the region for biodiversity, urban heat reduction and active transport is a focus for action. Resilience to the impacts of climate change is a common focus, particularly in areas of flooding around the Yarra River and Dandenong Creek, with greater alignment required between flood agencies. Councils in the region aspire to achieve and maintain carbon neutrality.

Resource conservation and climate action can also help stimulate economic activity and enhance social cohesion.

Our strategic priorities

To support the four pillars, five strategic priorities have been identified, informed by the emerging Council Plans. For each, actions are identified that seek multiple benefits across pillars, supported by ERG governance, operations and advocacy.

Strategic Priority 1 - Build shared services and increase joint procurement

Shared services and joint procurement present opportunities to maintain and improve council services in a rate-capped, fiscally constrained environment.

Despite potential benefits, significant technical, financial, political and risk barriers exist. The ERG is committed to developing a longer-term, logical pathway to increase shared services and joint procurement by councils in the region and to undertake the foundational work required to see this occur. This would:

- interrogate previous collaborative work by councils and LGV to inform shared service opportunities
- leverage regional knowledge and expertise to identify opportunities (both quick wins and longer term)
- benchmark IT platforms and forward commitments to create a 10–20-year vision towards a common platform
- understand corporate governance options best suited to benefit realisation and managing risk and reward.

Priority 1: Build shared services and increase joint procurement initiatives

1: Shared Services Roadmap: detailed analysis of short-listed opportunity areas to develop an implementation plan.
2: IT Integration Vision: 10-20-year vision to align ICT / ERP platforms and approaches.
3: Pilot one or two shared services / joint procurements that meet the agreed criteria.

Strategic Priority 2 - Enhance regional infrastructure

With a 71 per cent increase of housing by 2050 (212,500 additional dwellings), new and upgraded community infrastructure will be needed to meet future residents' demand. *Plan for Victoria* fails to demonstrate how and where additional infrastructure will be delivered.

While Infrastructure Victoria's draft new *30-year Infrastructure Plan* recognises the challenges of providing infrastructure in a fiscally constrained environment, the assumption remains that community infrastructure needs in established areas can simply be absorbed and provided for by local government without significant disruption.

A regional approach to quantify and spatially understand future community infrastructure is an important first step to:

- optimise use and maximise access to community infrastructure - considering cross-border cooperation
- advocate for changes to funding models
- prioritise investment and the sequencing of infrastructure delivery, including future open space connectivity needs.

Priority 2: Enhance regional infrastructure initiatives

4: Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis - spatial analysis of impact of housing targets against community infrastructure provision benchmarks to address the likely gap over time, supported by a community infrastructure prioritisation tool. This would map the region's community infrastructure and develop GIS layers.

5: Open Space Connectivity Strategy - to identify regional opportunities for open space connectivity, biodiversity and urban greening.

Strategic Priority 3 - Transform movement in the East

The eastern region is highly car dependent, with 79 per cent of trips made by car and only 7.3 per cent by public transport. With 59 per cent of households having two or more vehicles, projected growth would bring 330,000 more vehicles and congestion to the region. There is significant opportunity to reduce the number of short trips made by car and encourage more walking, cycling and public transport use.

Infrastructure Victoria research found that buses are a huge opportunity for Melbourne as the most cost-efficient public transport system which is true for the eastern region. Weaknesses and opportunities in the region's bus network are well documented and priority bus lanes, route extensions, increased frequency and other interventions are recommended.

Big build projects (LXR, SRL, NEL) are having a major impact on the region but are not place-making projects and our ability to influence is low. Safe and attractive walking and cycling routes and trails (including for e-bikes to counter distance and topography) to and within activity centres and corridors is a key objective of the ERG councils.

A *Sustainable and Integrated Transport Plan* is the necessary first step to transform movement in the east and to have more impact on how places transform. This would:

- synthesize and bring together the significant council work to date
- engage directly with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and key stakeholders to strengthen collaboration across centres, along corridors and on major projects
- build the evidence base to support planning and advocacy.

Priority 3: Transform movement in the East initiative

6: Sustainable & Integrated Transport Plan - with DTP, bring together the significant work done in this area and share transport data to:

- agree on a prioritised, evidenced list for improvements to all modes (train, tram and bus) regarding route changes, service frequency changes, gaps and on-demand services
- agree on a prioritised, evidenced list for improvements to road infrastructure
- identify key corridors and their needs
- agree best practice principles for centres including greening and active transport
- update the Regional Trails Strategy considering the impact of North East Link and Suburban Rail Link and preferred commuter and local cycling routes
- establish consistent requirements for EV charging stations
- set up a sustainable mobility monitoring index.

Strategic Priority 4 - Support community safety

Communities in the eastern region are increasingly concerned about safety with crime statistics indicating double digit growth in crime rates for most ERG councils.

While Victoria Police is the key agency responsible for community safety, the draft *National Urban Policy* highlights several areas relevant to community safety, and that our 'urban areas are safe' when there is: Inclusivity and safety in public spaces; Safety for marginalised groups; Crime prevention; and Safety in movement.

With an objective to: *Ensure community safety through policing, law enforcement and prevention activities,* the indicators[1] used by VicPol are:

- Community safety during the day and at night
- Community safety on public transport
- Crime statistics
- Number of road fatalities
- Number of road injuries.

Placemaking and well-maintained public spaces can play a part to discourage crime through measures such as adequate lighting, passive surveillance, and sightlines. Creating safe places must be central to the fast rollout of new housing.

Local government cannot address community safety issues alone. It can help to facilitate a place-based coordinated response between federal and state government and service agencies. A roundtable would assist in role clarity, information sharing, well targeted actions and clear communications to support improved community safety and perceptions of safety.

Priority 4: Support community safety initiatives

7: Community safety regional roundtable - bring community safety stakeholders together to share information, discuss collaborative actions, and establish a role and responsibility 'RASCI' to ensure role clarity and clear communications. The RASCI framework is: Responsible, Accountable, Supportive, Consulted or Informed.

Strategic Priority 5 - Develop local employment

Growing local businesses and local activities grows local employment.

Despite strong levels of employment self-containment in the eastern region, challenges remain for people with a disability, women over 45, culturally and linguistically diverse people, disengaged youth, and First Nations people in accessing employment.

The contribution of creative industries to the Victorian economy is growing year on year ($40.5B in 2022-23) and utilises council infrastructure (galleries, museums, performing arts venues, libraries and the public realm). Festivals, events, public art and cultural programs build community and create local employment.

The ERG seeks to enhance cooperative economic development activities regionally. There is an opportunity to take a strategic approach to programming to make better use of regional infrastructure and support development pathways for artists and the region's creative industries. This should increase opportunities, leverage investments and reduce duplication.

Priority 5: Develop local employment initiatives

8: Foster co-operative economic development opportunities - identify and deliver short and longer-term opportunities for collaboration and shared activity.
9: Develop pathways for artists in the east - explore how artistic talent and the creative industries can be cultivated within the region.

[1] Source: 2023–24 Budget Paper No. 3 Service Delivery and *Victoria Police Corporate Plan 2022-2023: Priority area - Community safety*

Actions summary: 2025 - 2029

#	Actions to support strategic priorities	Year				Partner	Project type				Alignment			
		1	2	3	4		**JP**: Joint Procurement **SS:** Shared Services **IP:** Integrated Planning **Ad:** Advocacy				People	Economy	Environment	Places
							JP	SS	IP	AD				
1	Shared Services Roadmap					LGV, MAV					✓	✓	✓	✓
2	IT Integration Vision										✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Shared Services/Joint Procurement Pilots										✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Community Infrastructure Needs Analysis					DTP/IV					✓			✓
5	Open Space Connectivity Strategy					SRV					✓		✓	✓
6	Sustainable & Integrated Transport Plan					DTP					✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Community safety regional roundtable					VicPol					✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Foster co-operative economic development opportunities										✓	✓		✓
9	Develop pathways for artists in the east										✓	✓		
ERG Governance, Operations and Advocacy														
10	Foster productive relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate sharing of best practice approaches to organisational development and service delivery.										✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Support regional responses to legislative and regulatory reviews impacting councils (P&E Act review)										✓	✓	✓	✓
12	As a single trusted voice on regionally significant matters, coordinate and support strategic and opportunistic advocacy to benefit ERG councils (e.g. longer council plan cycle; State election advocacy)										✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Deliver ERG meetings, CEO meetings, project support & communications (annual report, website & social media)										✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Council elections, Council Plan alignment and ERG Strategic Plan mid-term and full review										✓	✓	✓	✓

ERG discrete project Implementation / monitoring project outcomes Ongoing / BAU activity