



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

# Submission to the Inquiry into Growth Corridor Plans

Brotherhood of St Laurence

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# **1 The Brotherhood of St Laurence and outer suburban services and development**

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Growth Corridor Plans for outer suburban Melbourne. The Brotherhood of St Laurence is an independent non-government organisation with strong community links that has been working to reduce poverty in Australia since the 1930s. Based in Melbourne, but with a national profile, the Brotherhood continues to fight for an Australia free of poverty. We undertake research, service development and delivery, and advocacy, with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating the understandings gained into new policies, new programs and practices for implementation by government and others. The organisation has many years' experience contributing to economic and community development in the outer suburbs and interface regions, as well as in inner-city Melbourne.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence recognises the critical intersections between housing, employment, education, health, welfare, and access to services and facilities. We also recognise the complex challenges the state government faces in addressing the interconnected issues of population growth, housing affordability and community service provisions.

## **2 The need for social infrastructure planning**

The Brotherhood of St Laurence supports and welcomes the Growth Corridor Plans. We agree with the principles underpinning the Growth Corridor Plans, especially those which are seeking to: create diverse and vibrant new urban communities; integrate transport and land use planning; plan for local employment creation; create growth corridors with high amenity and character; and stage development to ensure the efficient and orderly provision of infrastructure and services.

However, when examining closely the Growth Corridor Plans, and in particular its 'Principles in Detail' chapter (Growth Areas Authority 2011), it appears that the discussion of the principles is quite general and does not refer to community and social infrastructural needs in an explicit manner. For example, under Principle 1 – 'Create diverse and vibrant new urban communities' (pp. 12–14), educational needs are discussed only in broad terms, implying that such needs do not include any other form of services apart from traditional providers of education such as schools (primary, secondary, Catholic and independent) and universities. In this case there is no mention of other community services that may assist in engaging young people and encouraging them to become active citizens in the community. Moreover, in the discussion of the specific plans, for example the Melbourne West Growth Corridor Plan, again there is no explicit mention of community services regarding education and health. Clause 4.4.3 – 'Regional community, health and education services and facilities' (p. 44) refers to traditional education providers such as primary and secondary schools and universities, but does not refer to any complementary services for young children, youths or any other age groups.

In a recent submission to the Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne (BSL 2011), the Brotherhood argued that planned social infrastructure is the foundation of economically and socially inclusive development. Critical to this endeavour is a social investment plan that recognises appropriate urban life as an entitlement of citizens across the life course and ensures that all have what they need to lead flourishing lives.

**In order to meet the community service needs of children, young people, families and older people in urban growth areas, we argue there needs to be appropriate physical infrastructure within those localities. As a priority, we request the state government to set aside land and a community sector capital fund to support the establishment of locally based infrastructure and integrated youth services.**

Unsurprisingly, access to health, education and support services in outer-suburban growth areas is significantly more difficult than in inner-city areas. Spiller (2011) finds that inner-city residents have greater education, health and employment choices than do residents in outer-suburban areas. Residents in the city centre, Monash corridor and Box Hill/Doncaster all enjoy health services choices superior to those in suburban growth areas.

We emphasise here the severe problems that occur when outer-suburban services are inadequate. This is illustrated below to provide a snapshot of issues the Brotherhood of St Laurence has encountered in its work with youth services in Caroline Springs and with people affected by transport disadvantage.

## Services in the Caroline Springs growth corridor

The Brotherhood's work in the Caroline Springs growth corridor in Melton Shire is illustrative of the need to plan for support services in outer-suburban growth areas. While the region does not have the same history as other disadvantaged regions in metropolitan Melbourne, our aim is take a leadership role in preventing social exclusion and economic dislocation in the area. Our approach is informed by the view that one of the surest forms of prevention lies in ensuring that young people and their families are supported in building their capacities to participate in social and economic life.

The rapidly emerging 'Western Edge' of Melbourne, the fastest-growing region in Australia (KPMG 2010), includes the growth corridors of Melton and Wyndham, which require significant investment in planning to accommodate substantial urban change. Planning requires careful consideration of future economic, transport, environmental, sport and recreation, business and government service needs. Attention also needs to be given to community infrastructure and issues relevant to social and economic participation. Many of the challenges for successful planning depend upon effective collaboration across the three levels of government.

Caroline Springs is a relatively new suburb opened up by developers in 1999. The area is characterised by a high proportion of families, young people and children. By 2016, it is estimated there will be over 25,000 children aged 0–14 and some 14,000 young people in the 15–24 age group living in the Caroline Springs growth corridor (Couche 2009 unpublished, pp. 2–3). Access Economics found that in 2006 the Melton Shire—within which Caroline Springs is situated—rated seventh-highest in the state for youth disengagement (Access Economics 2008, p. 18). As the forecast youth population increases, the lack of existing social and cultural activities and services, such as a local cinema and swimming pool, is likely to contribute to increasing disengagement. Limited access to suitable public transport to travel to and from surrounding areas is likely to further constrain youth activities. Other infrastructure and service gaps in this growth corridor include a lack of affordable leasable office space for services, limited vocational education and training programs, limited access to affordable information technology, and a lack of employment and wellbeing services.

With some of these infrastructure issues and the prospective needs of young people in mind, the Brotherhood's proposed Community Youth Centre facility aims to 'respond to youth, family and

community service needs in an integrated manner and to provide practical and informed service and support' to young people and their families moving into the area (BSL 2010, p. 4). Its key functions will be to:

- create and implement an effective 'one-stop' information advice and support network
- make provisions for specialist personal support and wellbeing services
- plan and establish a quality learning and skills development environment, accessible seven days per week
- establish a dedicated 'media-tech' resource centre
- include state-of-the-art event spaces and facilities
- provide leasable office space
- foster community-driven enterprise development initiatives (BSL 2010, p. 4).

A significant challenge for the community sector in undertaking a community building project in growth corridors is access to affordable office space for a reasonable period of time. Well-located real estate is either prohibitively expensive or unavailable, with little opportunity for shared work spaces, IT support, and car parking often cited as issues. Operating without a physical base in the area, community service staff are currently 'flying in and out' of the Caroline Springs growth corridor, in an attempt to provide services to the local community. The outcome has been a fragmented approach to service delivery despite efforts to counter this made by governments through their contracting arrangements. Having a site on which to physically co-locate youth services is a far superior way of ensuring an integrated response to their needs.

The development of a successful community youth centre relies on a collaborative model of governance across the three tiers of government. Local councils have been generally very supportive of having an increased community sector presence during the start-up stages of community building. However, they do not necessarily have the financial capacity to underwrite community sector involvement; and far too often the demand for community and cultural facilities is running well ahead of the financial capacity to provide such assets.

**The Victorian Government's commitment to planning successful growth corridors could be enhanced by the creation of a capital grants program which would provide one-off funding to local governments and/or community organisations to secure land and construct premises from which youth services can operate an integrated service offer.**

Recent data on Caroline Springs further demonstrate the need for planning for social infrastructure to prevent youth social exclusion. For example, the western region has below average levels of educational attainment. Around 45% of the population has a Year 12 or its equivalent, while the national average is 46.5%. Moreover, the Shire of Melton has higher than average youth unemployment of 15% and as high as 30% in pockets (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010), while the national average is 11.4% (ABS 2011).

Another aspect of concern is an increase in crime figures and an increasing number of young people offending in the Caroline Springs growth corridor. The local police are concerned about young offenders aged 10–14 years who are being processed for assault and property damage. This is an increase of 33% compared to the previous year (the data was supplied by Melton Police Service area, May 2011).

## Transport

Compounding these issues is transport disadvantage. Attempts to reduce such disadvantage in outer suburban areas have had varied success. For example, the Transport Connections program has been found to have had little success to date in improving access to local transport (Victorian Auditor-General 2011). Similarly, the Frankston / Mornington Peninsula Bus Service review identified the following problems: limited span of hours and days of operation and insufficient frequency of services, no east–west public transport links, and poor timetable connections between transport modes (Department of Transport 2009).

Poor public transport adversely affects social and economic participation. Financial hardship for people settling in outer suburbs is caused by the dual pressures of high mortgages and fuel costs associated with commuter travel by car (Dodson & Sipe 2008). Car-dominated travel also has flow-on environmental impacts in the form of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change (Loader 2008). Poor public transport can also hinder disaster management efforts and evacuations which may become more common with climate change.

The need for public transport planning in outer suburban areas is highlighted by these system failures and the difficulties in addressing them post hoc. We encourage the government to establish public transport infrastructure and facilities before growth areas are inhabited, in order to support mobility and community participation, and also to reduce reliance on household car use to contain costs for low-income households and greenhouse emissions.

We would also encourage the government to facilitate alternative modes of transport through well-planned footpath and bike path networks that cater for people with a range of abilities and mobilities— for example, mothers and prams, wheelchair-users and others with limited physical mobility caused by age and/or physical impairment. Such modes of transport should be encouraged through regular maintenance of facilities and the inclusion of appropriate road safety measures.

The physical amenity of spaces is also important, as open parks, shade areas, playgrounds, attractive walkways and waterways enrich places, enhance residents' enjoyment and engender feelings of connection and belonging.

These examples illustrate the effect of inadequate services and the impact on social liveability. Without adequate services, outer suburbs are particularly vulnerable to a number of related social problems. Households are susceptible to poor employment opportunities, higher levels of homelessness, poor physical and mental health and greater risk of the impacts of climate change. Good quality accessible infrastructure and services strengthen social capital and connectedness, thereby reducing the risks of subsequent social problems emerging.

## What needs to be done?

In a recent workshop co-convened by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the University of Melbourne, 'Planning for Healthier Growth', a large number of researchers and industry professionals (from government, private sector, community organisations and advocates) presented their case for the need for planning social infrastructure in growth corridor areas in Melbourne. The speakers presented different perspectives on the need for social infrastructure in growth areas, including economic evaluation, developers' perspective and identification of the needs of various groups in the community.

For instance, McDougall and Maharaj from SGS Economics and Planning argue that the accessibility of jobs and services is poor in outer-urban areas. They assert that effective plans for better providing growth areas with jobs and services, and improving their linkages with other areas of the metropolis, are rare. In their paper they present a speculative modelling which highlights that while costs of better equipping the growth areas may well be significant, they are likely to be outweighed by benefits, particularly benefits associated with workforce and transport productivity enhancements. They conclude that growth areas are significantly disadvantaged and this will worsen unless specifically targeted; that a fully integrated plan for better servicing growth areas is rare and this reflects complex service delivery arrangement; that key to success is spatially coordinating capital and recurrent expenditures; and that while the cost of better servicing growth areas is very large, it is likely to be outweighed by benefits. 'Improved government service delivery on the urban fringe, promoting vibrant town centres and improving transport links across the metropolis, should therefore be a priority for investment given the likely dividends and given the scale of future growth earmarked on the fringe of Australian capital cities' (McDougall & Maharaj 2011, p. 139).

At the end of the workshop, a future research agenda for partnerships between academia and industry was developed. Research questions and ideas covered social infrastructure needs of communities, the link between physical and social infrastructure, the role of participatory planning, integrated service delivery models, place management models, how to engage different groups in the community. Suggested research questions included:

- What are the resources communities need in order to flourish? Is there a threshold (quantity) and timeframe?
- What management models are in place now? Which work well and which do not? Are there any other options?

These research questions will be pursued by researchers from academia, community organisations, government and industry in order to address the pressing need for planning social infrastructure in growth corridor areas in Melbourne.

### **3 Recommendations**

A number of recommendations for the Growth Corridor Plans have been developed. These are based on the Brotherhood of St Laurence's years of experience in community development in outer suburbs of Melbourne:

1. The community sector to be included at the beginning of the growth corridor planning process. This will enable the community sector to inform the development of community infrastructure that will provide a base for community organisations to deliver services and facilitate integrated service delivery to residents in the growth corridors.
2. The Victorian Government to set aside land in growth corridor areas for the development of infrastructure and to provide a community sector capital fund for the establishment of community infrastructure according to identified local needs.
3. The Victorian Government to undertake further research and analysis to understand the combined effect of transport disadvantage and socioeconomic disadvantage in the growth corridor areas. Additional research should be resourced to better understand how to deliver community infrastructure that builds social cohesion and prevents economic exclusion.

In summary, the Brotherhood of St Laurence supports an approach to urban development that is informed by a social investment plan that ensures people of all ages and abilities are not excluded from educational, employment, social and recreational opportunities. Planned social infrastructure, supported by collaborative and inclusive governance structures, is the foundation of economically and socially inclusive urban development, and is a basic citizen entitlement. We urge the government to ensure the provision of employment and training opportunities, health care, transport infrastructure and social services through proactive urban planning mechanisms.

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