

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **2021–22 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 June 2021

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr James Newbury

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**



**WITNESSES**

Mr Shaun Leane, MLC, Minister for Suburban Development,

Mr Simon Phemister, Secretary,

Ms Emily Phillips, Deputy Secretary, Local Government and Suburban Development, and

Ms Sara Harbidge, Executive Director, Office for Suburban Development, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and welcome back Minister Leane, this time for the consideration of the suburban development portfolio. We invite you to make a 5-minute presentation, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

**Visual presentation.**

**Mr LEANE:** Thanks so much, Chair, for the opportunity to present on the suburban development portfolio this afternoon, and thanks to the committee as well. Suburban development builds on connections between the community and the government to deliver on shared priorities. It does this in three ways: by engaging to understand communities' priorities, delivering programs and grants, coordinating stakeholders and leveraging co-contributions to achieve common goals. In recent times suburban development has engaged with suburban communities to understand the impacts of the coronavirus and community priorities for recovery.

The budget commits \$11.8 million to the suburban development portfolio. The strengthening regional and metropolitan partnerships initiative on BP3, page 71, under the regional development portfolio, includes \$10.9 million over two years for the suburban development portfolio to continue the metropolitan partnerships program. This investment in metropolitan partnerships will ensure local voices continue to be heard and inform government in making decisions. The work of the partnerships will be strengthened, with a focus on local action on COVID recovery. The suburban revitalisation program drives suburban activity centres' renewal and addresses disadvantage.

An additional \$900 000 was provided in the budget for the revitalisation of Springvale Boulevard. We will work with the City of Greater Dandenong on this significant and shovel-ready project to revitalise Springvale's centre. This investment builds on the \$20.24 million in the November budget and the \$9.4 million provided for revitalisation as part of the building works stimulus package in May 2020. Together these investments will leverage more than \$53 million in co-investment in our suburban revitalisation programs and create over 400 jobs.

Over the last year the metropolitan partnerships have continued to engage Melburnians and have hosted virtual recovery round tables to identify community priorities for economic and social recovery. I take the opportunity to thank all the members of the partnerships, many of whom volunteer their time to work towards improving their local community. Throughout the year the government has responded with initiatives like the Let's Stay Connected Fund, which has helped local people overcome loneliness and isolation and stay connected with their communities during coronavirus and beyond, and the Neighbourhood Activity Centre Renewal Fund. In recent years the work of the partnerships has influenced government commitments and policies. I recently approved 16 projects from the Metropolitan Partnership Development Fund to the value of \$1.75 million. These projects will be delivered by local stakeholders, including councils. These projects will be announced shortly.

The Frankston and Broadmeadows revitalisation boards are continuing their great work, with 19 new projects to upgrade local infrastructure and services and support local businesses in innovation. Building on the success of Frankston and Broadmeadows, we have expanded the program to establish six new suburban revitalisation boards, including Lilydale, Boronia, Noble Park, Reservoir, Tarneit and Melton. Working with these boards, suburban development is delivering 57 projects focused on major streetscape upgrades and improvements to public infrastructure. Through the 2020 building work stimulus and the 2020–21 budget we have contributed \$14.7 million to these eight revitalisation sites, which will have a total value of \$38.9 million, leveraging contributions from councils and project partners.

The \$3 million Neighbourhood Activity Centre Renewal Fund is delivering 32 streetscape upgrades across Melbourne. This program has leveraged a further \$10 million in co-contributions from delivery partners, which is being invested directly into local communities.

We have finished on this slide for a reason: I think that the suburban development portfolio is the one portfolio that can supply funding for important community groups. We have got Sikhs Victoria and Volunteering Victoria up there. The young woman on the left-hand side is Abby Vidler from Riding for the Disabled Victoria. I might talk about her a bit later. As you can see, there is some great work by Aunty Jennine there in the museum in my neighbourhood, who I might talk about a bit later. It is a portfolio where we can support these great individuals and groups.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Maas.

**Mr MAAS:** Thank you, Chair, and thanks, Minister. If I could take you to the topic of the metropolitan partnerships program and specifically at page 71 of budget paper 3 of the 2021–22 budget, it allocates a further \$10.967 million to continue the state government's commitment to the metropolitan partnerships program. Would you be able to inform the committee why it is important to continue this program and how it has supported our community?

**Mr LEANE:** Yes. Thanks, Mr Maas. I think the great thing about the metropolitan partnerships and why we chose to fund the next two years in another round of this particular project is that we are lucky enough to have a number of high-level people in different professions and different aspects of life that volunteer their time to be on these metropolitan partnerships to give advice about their particular suburbs to the executive of the government. I think that is really important. For some of the work that they have done, you can look at reports from these metropolitan partnerships from even a couple of years ago and see some of the advocacy that has produced and helped guide government policy. There has been a common theme in a number of partnerships about social housing and the really important aspect of social housing. Can I compliment Minister Wynne on his recent announcement around the Big Housing Build.

I do not want to underplay the recent work of the partnerships, but if you go back a couple of years there was a real theme of the government doing some really major work in mental health, and this is where I am saying that we are getting advice from people from the suburbs up. If you go back to a couple of reports, you will see some advice around what we now call the Suburban Rail Loop. There was a metropolitan partnership that was advocating for a very similar project in their partnership. I can break down some of the different partnerships and the work they do across the metropolitan area, but I think in a metro region, as I said, their advocacy for affordable housing—their advocacy has actually come to fruition in Balaclava, where there were 46 affordable apartments built, and they are also advocating for further social housing. I think employment, youth employment and youth mental health have been themes—and not just about advocacy that the executive should do something about it, it is advocacy around how we can go about it as well. So it is not just telling us there are problems; it is also giving us solutions.

I really want to acknowledge the work of the eastern metropolitan partnership, their great passion. As I said, there are some high-level people who have volunteered in these groups, including council CEOs, and their advocacy around youth employment has been fantastic. They have spoken to us and they are going to embark soon on a bit of a mission. They want to create 50 jobs for young people in the east in 50 days. Can I acknowledge Minister Pulford, who recently spoke to that particular partnership around her ideas and how in the position she is in she might be able to assist. These are real outcomes.

The northern and western regions, particularly the northern region, their advocacy around improved cycling and walking tracks has been noted, but they have also—and this is the advice coming from people in the suburbs about what is important to them—been huge advocates for the bus networks and perhaps some more orbital routes, maybe some smaller buses that may be able to go on a continued orbit. I want to congratulate Minister Carroll on his announcement and his aspiration for a number of routes not to have a timetable. You will see that in some reports from these particular metropolitan partnerships, their advocacy around that. I want to thank Mr Carroll as well because he has actually met with the northern metropolitan partnership around this and listened to their advocacy firsthand. It is a form of us as the executive listening to people that are passionate about their suburbs and passionate about advocating for what would enrich the lives of the people that live in their suburbs.

Once again, can I thank all of those members of the partnerships for volunteering their time—they are volunteers—and volunteering their expertise. We believe it has been a great program for us to get further advice and ideas about new initiatives. I did ask the chairs of the partnerships in recent months if they could help identify what is really working as far as the COVID recovery and people assisting people during COVID—what is really working in their areas. Sometimes it can be a small group of people making a huge difference by starting an initiative and assisting people in all sorts of ways. I have asked the partnerships if they can identify what is really working and anything that might be quite unique but that is doing a fantastic job—if they could feed that into us. It might be initiatives that we can assist to replicate right through the metropolitan area—and the state for that matter. I am very pleased that we have received this extra funding, and I look forward to the partnerships continuing the great work that they are doing in this area. I cannot thank the individual members enough.

**Mr MAAS:** Excellent. Thank you, Minister. If I could take you to the topic of suburban revitalisation programs, and specifically budget reference BP3, page 71. It allocates \$900 000 to suburban revitalisation. Would you be able to inform the committee how this allocation will support current activity centre renewal programs in our suburbs?

**Mr LEANE:** Thanks, Mr Maas. We allocated \$12 million for six new revitalisation boards in the previous budget, and that was over two years. As you know, there are six new revitalisation boards, and we are working with those new groups as far as how they think that funding can be best allocated. But I have got to say, Mr Maas, this is a portfolio that can fund some really good initiatives and good individuals that are doing good things.

I was really pleased to go out to members of the Noble Park Revitalisation Board, led by Lee Tarlamis, where they are allocating that funding. I have got to say that it is supporting building the best all-abilities playground in Noble Park that I have ever seen. It is just spectacular, and actually it is not far off being completed. Just one of the aspects is that they are actually getting a trampoline that is wheelchair compliant. People in wheelchairs can actually bounce on this trampoline. I think it is the first one that we have seen in our state. Also, in that particular revitalisation board they are supporting a local street, I think it is Thomas Street from memory, that a number of Victorians of African descent have enterprises in. They have allocated some funding to do some work on that as well and to really boost those enterprises.

**Mr MAAS:** Excellent. Thank you, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Newbury.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you, Chair. Back to the metropolitan partnerships, Minister. As you were speaking about the portfolio area, and I appreciate your four-slide briefing on the partnerships, it was hard to get a tangible view of anything that has actually happened. There was \$6 million invested into the metropolitan partnerships. So I thought I would do what a normal member of the community would do. They would google and go to the government's website—Metropolitan Partnerships—and they would learn what you have been up to. If I can read it out to you:

The Partnerships are currently planning the 2020 engagement program.

And the website was last updated in August 2020—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, I would remind you that the scope of this inquiry is the estimates hearings and not Google. If you could keep your questions to the budget papers, please, that would be appreciated.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Labor Chair, I think that the government's expenditure and what the partnerships are doing are well within the scope of this budget hearing.

**The CHAIR:** If you could relate it to the budget estimates, that would be appreciated.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you, Labor Chair. Minister, give us an update. I mean, if the government cannot update its own website, give us an update. What has actually happened?

**Mr LEANE:** As far as the suburban development portfolio?

**Mr NEWBURY:** No, no. I am talking about the metropolitan partnerships now.

**Mr LEANE:** Look, I think I gave a pretty good response to Mr Maas's question, and it is about the community working and advising our government from the suburbs up. There have been a number of projects and a number of funds come out of these particular metropolitan partnerships. Part of it is to leverage investment on co-partnerships as well. So some of the programs and funding aspects of the metropolitan partnerships have actually leveraged funding for projects from local government and other partners as far as what the partnerships see as really important aspects for their suburbs. I mentioned before some of their advice. We get criticised, if you want, but we actually want to hear from the suburbs up and not dictate from state government down. We actually want to hear from the suburbs up what is important to them. And so, I think—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Can I ask: have you got a table, for example, of the number of engagements that you have had for each of the partnerships that you can provide to the committee?

**Mr LEANE:** Yes, of course. We can do that. And as I said before, there were a number of virtual engagements, and the themes were around the challenge around the global pandemic. As I said before, there were some really good people doing some good things in the suburbs supporting their community, and there were a lot of conversations and virtual meetings around how can state government support that. I mentioned before the Let's Stay Connected Fund, which was an initiative that came out of a metropolitan partnership. That was a discussion around isolation and loneliness even before unfortunately we were suffering the pandemic, but during the pandemic it was obviously really important that this issue about loneliness and people being isolated was actually amplified.

We have had programs that have come out of the metropolitan partnerships and the suburban development portfolio. There are some great examples just up there. You know, we had a program that was supported by metropolitan partnerships, Pick My Project. There is a great example there: Riding for the Disabled Victoria and that young woman, Abby Vidler. Obviously you can see she has a form of disability, but she does not see it as a form of disability, and through Riding for the Disabled Victoria she has been riding horses since she was quite young. She has a real goal and aspiration—and I think she is going to get there—that she is going to ride in the Paralympics in 2024. That is a new facility out at Wantirna for Riding for the Disabled Victoria that was only recently opened.

Getting back to what is great about this portfolio, it is a portfolio that does support these particular organisations, and Riding for the Disabled Victoria management told me they would never have been able to build this purpose-built facility in Wantirna without the support of suburban development. I am happy to take on notice anything you want as far as, you know, number of engagements. The partnerships found a way to engage, and they produced reports, so we can give you the reports as well if you want them.

**Mr NEWBURY:** The website I think needs a bit of an update. In terms of the plans themselves, I do not believe they have been updated since 2018. Would that surprise you?

**Mr LEANE:** No, that is not correct. So—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Well, these have been downloaded from the website.

**Mr LEANE:** Yes. I take your criticism that—

**Mr NEWBURY:** It is not a criticism. It is clearly a—

**Mr LEANE:** No. I think it is a fair—like, if the website needs to be updated, I accept that it is a criticism. We are happy to look at that.

**Mr NEWBURY:** And in terms of the plans, has anything been done on the plans? We have got a five-year plan. Has anything—

**Mr LEANE:** As I said, we have had recent reports from the metropolitan partnerships, and I have asked them to be adaptable during the recent global pandemic. I have asked them to put their mind to the issues about not just dealing with the global pandemic but recovery. And we have had reports from those particular partnerships that they have been doing great work right through—

**Mr NEWBURY:** I know there are a couple of vacancies on a couple of the committees. On a couple of the partnerships the government reps are vacant. I mean, are they going to be filled, do you think? I mean, I look at the inner south-east and the eastern and the government rep, who I understand is a public servant—they are both vacant as well. Is there an update on that?

**Mr LEANE:** Yes. The vacancies will be filled. And getting back to—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Website, plans, vacancies—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, could you allow the minister to answer the question, please.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you, Labor Chair.

**Mr LEANE:** I kind of do not get too hung up on semantics. I think it is just the work that gets done, and it has been really good work done by the partnerships. You can be as miserable as you like, but I think it is a great program and they are doing great work.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister and the team, for appearing this afternoon. Does the suburban development portfolio have any role in supporting Brimbank council to realise their *Sunshine Priority Precinct: Vision 2050*? I ask because Brimbank council and the community have gone to a lot of work in developing that vision and they feel that the airport rail proposal as it stands simply does not meet that vision and in fact does not realise the vision that the community has put forward.

**Mr LEANE:** I think, Mr Hibbins, as far as the metropolitan partnership, as far as whatever influence or advice that they have had on that particular project, I would have to take that on notice because I am not aware.

**Mr HIBBINS:** So you do not have a role to play in realising—

**Mr LEANE:** I am not saying I do not have a role to play, I am just saying that it is not something that I have had a conversation with that partnership about.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Well, further, if you could take it on notice, my understanding is that the government, through the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and the Department of Transport, actually requested that Brimbank and the community undertake that visioning process, and the question is: why would they be asked to do that if then subsequently in the airport rail project that vision is ignored?

**Mr LEANE:** I think, Mr Hibbins, being a transport precinct, I would advise you that maybe that is a question for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure or the Minister for Public Transport, and even the minister for precincts as well, which is also Minister Allan. That is where I would direct that question. I am sorry that I cannot assist you in this at this point, but I am happy to take it on notice and anything we can get you as far as the interaction with the metropolitan partnerships. I know we are not talking about local government, but even in local government I am prepared to look into that as well.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Thank you. Could you provide an update in terms of the 20-minute neighbourhood initiatives and the status of those?

**Mr LEANE:** The 20-minute neighbourhood initiatives?

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes.

**Mr LEANE:** Yes, sure. This is an initiative which, as you would know, was announced in 2018, before my time in this particular role, and it was a pilot program that was prepared and led by DELWP in partnership with local governments, the Heart Foundation and Victoria Walks and involved the preparation of neighbourhood plans for three pilot sites in Strathmore, Sunshine West and Croydon South. The 20-minute neighbourhood projects are funded through the office of suburban development with the support of DELWP and co-contributions from three local governments. \$120 000 each has been provided to the cities of Moonee Valley, Brimbank and Maroondah to implement 20-minute neighbourhood projects in Strathmore, Sunshine West and Croydon South. These projects will green the streets, provide space for walking and street trading,

establish pop-up parks, encourage cycling and walking, and support current council activities such as shopfront improvements and business grants.

The Sunshine West project is well advanced: parklets, streetscape work, road art have been installed and events and activities have been held to encourage the community to increase the use of the shopping strip. Starting in late February 2021 the Croydon South project will see the installation of pop-up parks and enhancements to public open space. It will also include events and activities. The Strathmore project involves the construction of parklets, purchase and fit-out for a mobile library and art leisure activities. These projects are supported and showcase the implementation of the government's 20-minute neighbourhood policy set out in *Plan Melbourne*. I have to say I think we all appreciated our 20-minute neighbourhoods in recent times, particularly in the metropolitan area, and the importance of everything that these pilots want to highlight as far as green streets; spaces to walk; street trading; pop-up parks, which were part of the answer for the COVID recovery; cycling and walking—

**Mr HIBBINS:** Just quickly, I presume as a pilot project there will be an assessment and then a view to expanding the program?

**Mr LEANE:** I have not made a decision on that yet, but I am happy to take that on notice as far as getting you a response.

**Mr HIBBINS:** All right, great. Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hibbins. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the suburban development portfolio. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request. The committee will take a short break and resume at 4.30 for consideration of the veterans portfolio with you. Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**