

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles

Melbourne – Friday 13 February 2026

MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair

Richard Welch – Deputy Chair

John Berger

Gaelle Broad

Katherine Copsy

Moira Deeming

Tom McIntosh

Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

WITNESSES

Simon Woodland, Manager, Sustainable Environment, and

Jodi Kennedy, General Manager, Community and Culture, Bass Coast Shire Council;

Michelle Wyatt, Manager, Climate Change and Environment (*via videoconference*), and

John Harvey, Sustainability Officer (*via videoconference*), Greater Bendigo City Council; and

Cr Tom Crook, Deputy Mayor (*via videoconference*),

Stuart McConnell, General Manager, Assets and Environment (*via videoconference*), and

Rebecca Lamble, Sustainability Officer (*via videoconference*), East Gippsland Shire Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the live broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

To kick off we will just have committee members introduce themselves to you. We will start with Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Richard Welch, Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Member for Northern Victoria.

Moira DEEMING: Moira Deeming, Member for Western Metropolitan.

Gaëlle BROAD: Hi, I am Gaëlle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for taking the time to appear before us today.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following this hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, could you please all state your full names and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of. To make it easier, we will start in the room.

Jodi KENNEDY: Jodi Kennedy from Bass Coast Shire Council.

Simon WOODLAND: Simon Woodland from Bass Coast Shire Council.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Then we will go to the screen, starting with Michelle.

Michelle WYATT: Michelle Wyatt, City of Greater Bendigo.

John HARVEY: John Harvey, City of Greater Bendigo.

Tom CROOK: Tom Crook, Deputy Mayor of the East Gippsland Shire Council.

Stuart McCONNELL: Stuart McConnell, also from East Gippsland Shire Council.

Rebecca LAMBLE: And Rebecca Lamble, Sustainability Officer at East Gippsland Shire Council as well.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments. We ask that they are kept to around 15 minutes maximum. I presume councils will be going separately. It is totally okay if you go slightly over; it will just reduce the discussion and question time. We might start with the room for opening remarks as well.

Simon WOODLAND: Thank you. Thanks for having us. I thought I would just give you a quick summary of Bass Coast's experience of installing publicly funded public EV charging stations. Council received funding through the Victorian government in mid-2022 to deliver EV charging stations at six sites across our shire. Four of these sites host 60-kilowatt fast chargers for public use, funded under the destination charging across Victoria program. The other two sites host 22-kilowatt chargers for council-owned fleet vehicles, with funding provided under the electric vehicles for charging council fleets program. Council was very eager to participate in these state-funded programs; even in 2022 Bass Coast recognised that the demand for public EV chargers was acute, growing exponentially and not being met by the private sector. At that time Bass Coast Shire, a region of 864 square kilometres 90 minutes south-east of Melbourne, was home to only two public EV charging stations with a capacity over 25 kilowatts. As a regional economy heavily dependent on tourism, Bass Coast recognised that it could not afford to be left behind in the transition to EVs.

The project set out to address a significant gap in EV charging infrastructure across our region and lay the groundwork for increased uptake of EVs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with our climate action plan and support skills, capability and employment growth. We partnered with our neighbouring councils, including South Gippsland shire, Wellington shire and East Gippsland Shire Council in a joint tender process so that we could achieve efficiencies of scale. That joint tender covered our charger hardware, maintenance and operating software and achieved those efficiencies from the outset. We also set out to achieve a consistent user experience across our region by having identical charging infrastructure. We engaged local contractors for civil and electrical works and began our detailed site investigations. We also engaged early with our network provider, AusNet, as we understood that local network capacity and constraints would be a deciding factor in determining the feasibility of our individual sites. From the outset, we were advised by AusNet that they would consider our applications on a site-by-site basis and only provide non-binding cost estimates for each of those network connections once we had submitted detailed electrical designs. This meant that we had to engage our electrical contractors in time-consuming and costly detailed work to develop each of those applications.

We prioritised our sites with a view to good public visibility, access to amenities, shops, recreational areas and the like, in our town centres and on main thoroughfares in townships in Wonthaggi, Grantville, Newhaven and Inverloch. The initial quotes that came back from AusNet at that stage ranged from thousands of dollars for a connection to in excess of \$200,000. Needless to say, those latter sites were deemed completely untenable, and we began the site selection process for some of those townships from scratch. Once again, we had to identify a site that met all our criteria and commission detailed electrical designs before resubmitting applications to AusNet and waiting for their process to restart.

The process of finalising our site selections has thus seen us cycle through several rounds of application to AusNet, each time incurring costs and delays to our project. In short, the project initially set out to complete installation of all 6 chargers in 12 months. By early 2024, the project budget requirement had increased by over 50 per cent, driven almost entirely by the cost of network upgrades, which now totalled over \$355,000 despite our best efforts to contain them. Our public chargers in Wonthaggi, Grantville and Newhaven were just commissioned in December of 2025 and January of 2026, almost four years later. Nearly four years after commencing our project, we are still waiting on connection of our public charger in Inverloch. Needless to say, we have had countless inquiries from the community, from local media and visitors in that time that we have had to field and try and explain the delay, and our experience ultimately leaves us questioning whether network service providers have the capacity in their poles and wires and in their businesses to support an efficient and

affordable transition to electric vehicles, particularly across regional Victoria. Therefore, I suspect we will support most of the recommendations made by our colleagues in regional councils here. But the one we would like to most highlight is that distribution network service providers need to collaborate with local councils to share information transparently and in a timely fashion. They should engage a dedicated team within their business to work with project proponents, streamline the process of identifying viable sites, and support charging station owners throughout the installation process to achieve efficiencies. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much. We might move to Bendigo now.

Michelle WYATT: Thank you. Michelle, Manager, Climate Change and Environment at the city. I will echo those experiences of our friends at Bass Coast. For context, Bendigo is regional centre. We have about 125,000 people and we are growing to 200,000 people by 2050. Currently, we are exceptionally car dependent and anticipate that, while we hope that will change, we are realistic that our community is still going to rely on private vehicles to get around in the future, and that will increase demand for public charging. Currently, we have five locations with fast public chargers, two locations have public chargers that are owned by the city and managed by a CPO.

I guess our key message is that councils are a really important stakeholder in the electric vehicle and electric vehicle charging space, and we are not only a land manager, a regulator, and have policies that will direct where chargers will go, but we also in many cases own the infrastructure. As mentioned, we recognise the need to expand our network. We are very much under-provided for in Bendigo in terms of fast chargers, and so we are working collaboratively with other councils in our region on a collective procurement process to dramatically expand our electric vehicle charging network across our region. This comes with complexities which have been discussed by Bass Coast. One of them is the up-front cost to do that. Whether it is ourselves or the charge point operators, coming up with the up-front capital cost to actually invest in a network across quite a dispersed region is in many cases prohibitive. We recognise that there is funding available. In many cases, that has been directed to the private sector such as Chargefox, Evie Networks or NRMA. We would ask that some of that funding is available to councils as well, in recognition of the role we play in owning the assets and managing the land.

On top of that, we have had similar experiences when we have progressed our own chargers on our own land. Up-front capital cost has been difficult, and knowing what those costs are going to be ahead of time has been opaque in many cases due to the costs in upgrading power or extending power from the power supply. Waiting for a response from, in our case, Powercor to connection requests can delay projects significantly, and it puts a lot of uncertainty around the business model for charging infrastructure.

In addition, we feel that we not only want to see our city centre and high tourist destinations serviced by electric vehicle charging infrastructure, but we want to make sure that our smaller towns do not miss out on those opportunities. There are some locations that are less profitable for the private sector, so that is where we see councils playing an important role, to be able to provide public charging in lower trafficked areas to ensure that there is access for the broader community, and that comes with a lot of complexities and difficulties. Lots of those smaller towns do not have the power quality that we have in the city centre. They would need significant upgrades to enable sufficient fast chargers to be installed. The costs could be prohibitive for local government and will not be borne by the private sector if they are not going to get a return on investment. That is all the more reason to look at supporting initiatives that de-risk those investments in regional and rural locations and provide that extra support to councils to co-fund the capital investment.

I think I might leave it there because there is a lot more in our submission, but I am happy to take questions on other elements of our submission.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much for that, and we will go to East Gippsland.

Tom CROOK: Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Tom Crook, Deputy Mayor for the East Gippsland Shire Council. Thanks for the opportunity to speak today.

East Gippsland is a large rural municipality with coastal, farming and tourism communities. We also have higher levels of disadvantage than the state average and a predominantly older population. Reliable, affordable transport is essential to participation in our region.

Five years ago our community pushed for public electric charging, particularly to close a major gap in a place called Cann River on the Sydney–Canberra–Melbourne route. With no statewide plan in place, our local government moved to fulfil this need, and since then we have helped deliver one of regional Victoria's strongest public charging networks through council-owned fast chargers, private operators on public land and privately owned chargers that are open to the public. Sixteen public charging stations now operate across East Gippsland complemented by destination chargers at hotels and visitor sites. These are well used and have been delivered through council investment, government programs and partnerships with Tesla, Evie Networks and NRMA.

Our experience clearly shows that if you build the network, people will use it, but this work has also shown that councils cannot continue expanding the public network on their own. Providing charging infrastructure is not core council business or a funded local government role at this stage, and we cannot guarantee equitable access as adoption grows without clear direction and resources from key partners such as the state of Victoria. For us the regional rollout of electric vehicle infrastructure is an essential thing, but it is also very important for equity reasons. In some of our small and remote towns suitable public land is scarce. Electricity connection costs can be extremely high, and if one charger fails there is often no backup. Without policy intervention, private investment is very likely to concentrate in our higher return towns, leaving places like Marlo, Swifts Creek, Nowa Nowa and other far-flung communities with the serious risk of possibly missing out. To avoid this, we believe we need deliberate regional coverage, fair pricing and reliability standards and a requirement that new infrastructure supports all communities. Standardising connection costs and adopting cost recovery pricing we think would largely prevent regional drivers from paying more. We think that daytime solar-aligned tariffs would improve affordability and reduce network impacts. We are really mindful that Victoria urgently needs a statewide charging plan. Victoria cannot meet –

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt. I might just get you to turn your video off because the audio is quite laggy and your video has frozen for us anyway.

Tom CROOK: Without a clear plan or structure, councils should not be left to design their own networks on a case-by-case basis. A Victorian electric vehicle charging strategy, which we think is really needed, ideally should also set statewide coverage targets, site selection principles, funding mechanisms and technical standards, and then ideally break these down into delivery plans that local government can partner on to see happen. This would ensure that a coordinated rollout occurs rather than the patchwork of market-driven outcomes and individual council plans that we currently see. The plan must also define how public land and public car parks [Zoom dropout]

The CHAIR: What we might do is start with questions, and the committee staff can troubleshoot with East Gippsland in the meantime. We will start with you, Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, sure. Thanks so much for making your submissions. Tourism is really important to all of you, and personally, in Eastern Victoria I know how important it is to Bass and to East Gippsland. What really worries me about bottlenecks in peak tourist periods is that tourists will not come and spend money in your economy. I just want to ask a question I have asked a couple of times about fast charging versus slower charging so you get that sticky tourism spend. What do you think that need is? And then I might come back and ask some more questions about the DNSPs.

Simon WOODLAND: If I may, Bass Coast recognises – we call ourselves, and I think it is based on solid data, but we believe we are the most tourist-dependent region in Australia after Uluru, in terms of our economy relying on the visitor to bring dollars to the region. So yes, we were absolutely determined to get these high-speed chargers, and by that we mean 60 kilowatts. They are nothing on the Tesla 250-kilowatt chargers that you see now. They will add about 100 kilometres of range in 15, 20 minutes is my understanding. So that is significant for people who have that range anxiety. We are well within reach of daytrippers. Most of our visitors are daytrippers in terms of visitor numbers. Visitor spend tends to come from the overnighters, who might then charge where they are staying at a B & B or an accommodation facility, but those higher speed charges were definitely a focus for us.

Tom McINTOSH: What do you think the cost to you is from the delays and the failures of the DNSPs to deliver services or connections and information to you in a reasonable time?

Simon WOODLAND: What have the costs amounted to?

Tom McINTOSH: Yes.

Simon WOODLAND: Well, it depends. If we are talking dollar costs, we think the total connection cost is currently going to come to around the \$350,000 mark for all six of our sites.

Tom McINTOSH: The time you have spent?

Simon WOODLAND: The time – I think we have spent at least half a million dollars in officer time, both securing council approval for additional council budget to make this project work and officer time, so project managing, chasing answers from AusNet and going through the cycle again with our local contractors and the like. I shudder to think if we had started a clock at the start of this project how many hours, but our best estimate would be that it is something in the order of half a million dollars in addition to the \$1.3 million to \$1.4 million we are now spending in cash.

Tom McINTOSH: I might bring Michelle into the conversation as well. When we have got these monopoly providers, and obviously you guys are dealing with water and other providers like DNSPs, how critical is this? This is something we are talking about that is critically important. Transport is key to your economies. How big are these failures appearing compared to other ones? I do not get this level of feedback around water boards et cetera.

Michelle WYATT: I think that is a good question. We have a really good and collaborative relationship with Coliban Water, as with our other infrastructure providers. In our region Powercor is our DNSP. I guess the collaborative attitude has gone up and down with time, but overall we find that there is not as much transparency around the grid capacity and the costs of the connection fees as we would like, and a lack of maybe capacity at their end to work collaboratively with us on, like, a largish project of multiple electric vehicle charging opportunities – to help work with us on triaging those and determining which ones are going to work from a distribution network perspective. They just do not, from our experience, have the staff or the time or the capacity to do that sort of collaborative work. I think, as Bass Coast mentioned, it is more reactive. They will only provide us with an answer when we ask a very narrow, specific question, and then we have to pay for that response, which is basically a request for a connection. That goes beyond just electric vehicle charging. Obviously the same applies if we are trying to electrify a facility that needs a power upgrade. We have the same difficulty in getting a sense of what would be possible before we have designed a solution that we then find out is not actually going to be feasible within the current grid constraints. I think overall we find Powercor a little bit more difficult, in some cases, to collaborate with compared to some of the other services that operate in our region.

Tom McINTOSH: Thank you so much for sharing this information. I hear various sentiments out on the ground where people are trying to make connections, and it is really disappointing to hear. Just as a closing comment, I ask: it sounds like one of the key things is having that vision and availability up-front, of available, accessible points where you can at least start the process, and hopefully they do not draw it out and make it slow and burdensome, dragging down the economic productivity of our state. But that up-front information is a key point. Is that right?

Simon WOODLAND: Yes, and we understand that information. It requires an iterative process for them to understand. For example, when we have tried to install smaller chargers, say, 7 kilowatts, 22 kilowatts, there are nowhere near as many hurdles because they are obviously not putting as much demand on the network. It is the 60-kilowatt-and-above chargers that seem to be a real sticking point. We understand that that is an iterative process, but our concern is – to Michelle's point – our network provider does not appear to have any dedicated resource, any business process specific to this challenge within the business. We are simply treated as yet another connection customer, and we join the queue alongside the local IGA, who wants to upgrade their refrigeration and therefore is going to put in a bigger demand –

Tom McINTOSH: Maybe they could take some of their budget advertising telling everyone how great the distributors are to spend on actually being great distributors. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr McIntosh. We will go to Mrs Broad.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you very much to everybody for appearing today. I am interested in East Gippsland. I do not know if you are able to talk about it, but it strikes a chord with me because the connection is such an issue for mobile blackspots in our regions, for telecommunication outages, for power supply. It just seems very intermittent in some areas, and I have spoken to businesses where they are up several times overnight plugging their appliances back into generators and then back into the network because of the ongoing power outages that we seem to have and to businesses that have lost stock because it fails them. I guess this is a different system. We have heard about 1.4 million additional chargers needed in the regions, and it has been flagged that it is not necessarily economical in the regions. But when you look at the priorities of councils, and perhaps some of you are not as regional as some of the councils I am thinking of, but can you comment on it? Because with trains we have had the same issue. There are not enough train carriages in some areas. We do not have bus services. Even 10 minutes out of Bendigo, there are places without bus services. So when you look at priorities, what are some of the council priorities and where does this sit with the rollout of EVs and charging stations in regional areas?

Stuart McCONNELL: Yes, I am happy to have a go at that if possible, Chair.

The CHAIR: Please.

Tom McINTOSH: On a point of order, Chair, I just want to be clear: does this sit within the terms of reference? Are you asking –

Gaëlle BROAD: It is about priorities of councils, and we have got councils here.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay.

The CHAIR: The terms of reference are pretty broad. I had a look again yesterday following other points of orders, and it does say any other matters the committee deems relevant.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay.

The CHAIR: So I think if we can allow some –

Gaëlle BROAD: I think we have seen the evidence of the lack of connection.

The CHAIR: I am happy to go ahead with it, keeping in mind to keep it somewhat confined to the purpose of the inquiry.

Stuart McCONNELL: Okay. Thank you. Look, regional rollout is essential for equity. Obviously it is going to take a combined approach through private–public partnerships, the private sector and state government sponsorship to build the infrastructure we need in the regions. I think it is fair to say that the bigger town centres are where the stronger business cases exist for private investment – not to say that that would not happen on public land, and I have got some other commentary on that. But certainly our more remote and regional settlements are at a real risk of missing out if we do not see some regional coverage, prioritisation and equity measures put in place, because we will not see the private sector invest in those places because the business cases just are not as strong. There are simply not as many users as those either metro or more populated town centres. So it is really important that we consider both landscape scale coverage but community coverage in this infrastructure. Our experience demonstrates really strongly that when you build it, people use it.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Gaëlle BROAD: I am interested in the GovHub installation in Bendigo. What are the costs involved in that? How much has that cost the council?

Michelle WYATT: The GovHub was not built with electric vehicle charging in the building, to our disappointment. So council has decided to invest in our own charging at a car park behind the building, which will have chargers for our fleet, which are slower chargers, as well as one dual-port fast charger, which will be accessible to the public when council is not using it. The total cost of that project was about \$350,000–\$380,000, which includes all the electrical upgrades, the chargers themselves and the necessary upgrade to the car parking area, because it was a gravel area, so we needed to do some civil works. It was a fairly expensive exercise, but we saw it as really critical to enable our fleet transition to progress. We recognise there is a just an

undersupply of fast chargers for the public in the city centre, so we wanted to be able to provide at least one additional opportunity.

Gaëlle BROAD: Chair, if I may ask a question, because it was taken up earlier with the point of order. With the stranded assets, I was interested in the costs borne by council with software and parts missing for some. We heard from council earlier talking about Apollo Bay where there were stranded assets not being utilised. Is that a common problem? I guess you talked about a four-year wait just to get started, but what is the cost borne because of the assets that are not working? Is that common?

Michelle WYATT: Through the Chair, I am happy to quickly answer that. I am sure the other councils can answer. For us, we have experienced costs associated with vandalism that has needed to be rectified, and then parts that break down that need to be replaced. I think with the early chargers that were installed as a part of our early Charging the Regions project, that was new technology which just was not as superior as the more recent technology. I cannot quantify the cost to council, but it would be thousands of dollars of lost charging revenue, but just as importantly frustration from the community when the chargers are not available because of these delays. But I am sure the other councils have other experiences, and I know in our region we have had chargers that have not been able to be fixed for months and months, and of course that is many thousands of dollars of lost revenue.

The CHAIR: Thanks Ms Broad. We will go to Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. We have heard from metro councils recently, and we have heard that there are different challenges for different councils – regions needing gaps in the charging network filled, for example. But for each of your councils, are you also seeing densification in your town centres? I just wanted to check in – are the issues around multi-unit developments and so on popping up for you as well as regional councils?

Simon WOODLAND: Briefly, I would say yes, probably less acutely than you would have heard from our urban councils, I suppose, just by merit of having fewer of those dwellings, but the more infill development we have, the more they show up. And if anything, I would say that we are probably less equipped to deal with them because we are less experienced than – they are not standard bread-and-butter yet in places like Bass Coast. But many of our townships are undergoing that densification process, so we do draw heavily on the networks that were referenced by our local government colleagues in the previous session around getting in touch with our urban counterparts, going ‘Hey, how do you do this, and make sure you do it right the first time?’

Jodi KENNEDY: Can I just add to that? I think the other important thing is making sure all the systems and processes are in place, so your planning schemes and that requiring the developer to deliver these as part of their applications. At the moment it is a negotiation process. So making sure we have got the right tools in place so that we can get those outcomes on the ground is really important.

Katherine COPSEY: We have talked a lot about charging, but whether time of use and encouraging changes in behaviour can also help to alleviate some of the problems that are popping up, or just to help people make better use of technology that they have already got installed at home. Is this a focus of councils, and what more can the state government do to facilitate this for you in the regions?

Tom CROOK: Look, it is certainly something that our council – through you, Chair – is aware of and [Zoom dropout] about the use of 7-kilowatt chargers as opposed to the fast charging network. We really see the 7-kilowatt point as probably pretty – [Zoom dropout]

The CHAIR: What I might do is keep going with questions from Ms Copsey, and then hopefully we get them back.

Katherine COPSEY: We could get that on notice.

The CHAIR: Yes, we can take that one on notice.

Simon WOODLAND: If I may, through the Chair, I can try and ESP what our friends at East Gippsland might have been trying to say. We acknowledge that a range of charging infrastructure is going to ultimately be needed, and that 7-kilowatt sort of household-level charger is what a lot of EV users might find they are

installing at a home level, which is not likely to use or require a great deal of network connection expense or upgrade cost and would make excellent use of daytime solar, for example. Our EV users tell us that, 'I've got solar at home. I can effectively charge my car for free using my solar through a 7-kilowatt charger in the 3 to 6 hours of daylight I get in the middle of the day,' which obviously drives the business case for that household shifting to EV, or at least adopting one EV, enormously. The cost of running transport for that household in a car-dependent regional area is massively reduced, so we absolutely encourage that. We do not feel like council has necessarily got a very active role other than information sharing. We host workshops and provide people with that information so they can make that decision. But it is not necessarily a bread-and-butter role for local government to get in and help them do that.

Katherine COPSEY: Great. And with my last 30 seconds, I would just be keen to –

The CHAIR: You can have a bit more if you need to.

Katherine COPSEY: Oh, great. That is fine. I will keep this moving, just quickly checking in on fleet transition goals for each of your councils and how you are progressing to that and what the barriers are at the moment.

Rebecca LAMBLE: Can I from East Gippsland answer that one, as we have just undertaken a fleet transition plan?

The CHAIR: Please.

Rebecca LAMBLE: Okay. Just last year we undertook a fleet transition plan. We are 10 per cent of Victoria. We have over 150 vehicles with lots of tools of trade. We spend a lot of time out on the road. Our finding is that if we can install slower 7-kilowatt chargers, we do not need to oversize with 50-kilowatt DC charging, and that negates the need to upgrade switchboard costs. Basically, what we have found is if we could bring forward \$700,000, by year five we will be saving \$350,000 every year in fuel costs. At the moment we are just at the start of the journey, and we are just incrementally changing some of our pool vehicles over to electric vehicles.

Michelle WYATT: Through the Chair, I am happy to provide Bendigo's experience. We also have a fleet transition plan. We have progressed our passenger fleet transition as much as we can with the charging infrastructure available. Now that we have got some more charging infrastructure, that will accelerate. Our main barrier, though, is charging for heavy vehicles at our depot. The main barrier to accelerating that process is, again, charging at the depot and the electricity supply to that site. We anticipate it is going to need to be upgraded. We do not know how much by. We do not know how much that is going to cost yet. So that is a priority for us – to understand the constraints and the cost to upgrade so that we can get the trunk infrastructure in and get the chargers in place. Without that charging we are unable to increase our electric vehicle numbers at the depot. Even as the heavy vehicle market is progressing towards products that are more and more suitable, that has been a barrier. But we know that that is going to improve over the next few years, and we are confident that we will be able to increase our investment in heavy vehicle electric alternatives once we have the charging in place.

The CHAIR: Gotcha. Great. Thanks, Ms Copsey. We will go to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, everyone, for your contributions and presentations. If I could ask Michelle in Bendigo, Ms Wyatt, on the \$450,000 investment you made on the charger at the community hub, what is the return on investment there? What is the internal rate of return on that investment? If that is too precise, I am happy to take that on notice.

Michelle WYATT: So you are talking about at the GovHub, the charging infrastructure for our own fleet?

Richard WELCH: No.

Michelle WYATT: That was – no?

Gaelle BROAD: It is at the GovHub.

Richard WELCH: Oh, it is not a public charger?

Michelle WYATT: We do have one public charger incorporated into that project, one dual port.

Richard WELCH: Right.

Michelle WYATT: The return on investment for that public charger, for the dual port, I guess if you take out some of the infrastructure costs, would be very good. We have done some modelling of similar projects in locations across Bendigo, and we anticipate, depending on the fees that are charged to the user, we could get a return on investment within a few years.

Richard WELCH: But I do not think you can take the infrastructure cost out because that is part of the economic equation. I think it would be useful to unbundle, unpackage, the cost–benefit analysis of it. That is what would have led the council to make the decision to invest as opposed to the private sector making the decision to invest.

Michelle WYATT: I guess the infrastructure costs for the site behind our GovHub were higher than ordinarily would be expected because we had to construct the car park as well, which is not always the case in another public setting. Having said that, we invested in that location mainly because we needed the chargers for our own fleet. The private sector is interested to some degree in expanding the network in Bendigo. They do see that there is a return on investment, and there is over time, depending on the assumption that usage will increase with the increased number of vehicles on the road. You can see pricing is going up as well to ensure that return on investment. What we are noticing, though, is that the private sector has an added bonus, I guess. It is easier for them to invest because they are getting some public sector funding for their new chargers. We are still being approached by CPOs who are looking to expand in Bendigo because they have got some public funding, which has not been available to councils. With that public funding, if that came to councils, our return on investment would significantly improve. We would be getting a return within a year or two.

Richard WELCH: Okay, thank you. I will cast this question to whoever wants to catch it. We have heard from a number of witnesses here on the performance of the DNSPs, and the frustrations and difficulties have been very well articulated. We have not yet heard from them. There must be some complexities that are not getting out on the table here. I mean, to your knowledge, is the provision of these points profit-making or loss-making? Is it a cost centre or a profit centre for the DNSPs?

Simon WOODLAND: If I could jump in there first, I think, for me, the overwhelming sense we have is just of opacity. I actually do not know how to answer your question because we do not know. All we know is we make a submission, and they tell us, almost out of a black hole, what they are going to charge us to make that.

Richard WELCH: So it is a black box.

Simon WOODLAND: Yes. I am not aware of any formula or any transparency around how they come to that. It feels like we are simply being – whoever brings them the first proposal in that corner of the neighbourhood that requires a network upgrade shoulders the burden, the cost, of upgrading their network, their assets, to then supply that electricity and then pay for that electricity through a retailer. So, yes, it is very difficult to know, and they are not forthcoming with information, either proactively or on request, as to why the cost is that. They say, ‘That’s simply the cost. If you want, pick a different site.’

Richard WELCH: I think we have heard it today even that the cost and the process of a low-power charger versus a high power, which obviously implies levels of complexity are in there.

Simon WOODLAND: Yes, I imagine there is complexity there.

Richard WELCH: And again, it comes back to the alignment of interests. That seems to me classic corporate behaviour: ‘This is costing us money, therefore we’re not incentivised to put resource to it.’ And even if it is a monopoly, that still can be true. I just would like to hear from the DNSPs, actually. Thank you. That is all I have got.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thanks, Mr Welch. We will go to Mrs Deeming.

Moira DEEMING: Thank you. It has been very interesting listening to you all, and I really felt for you all, for the amazing effort that you put in. It is really rough to have good intentions and time and money wasted and for everyone to have hope build up and then to hit so many walls.

I am so sorry if someone else just asked this – I just went on a bit of a deep dive because of the first round of information – but you were given these grants to spend, to do this project, and in many cases you ended up with a financial loss, right, and one of the main reasons was because of this inability to get a functional working relationship with DNSPs. So in the future would it be better, when you are getting government grants, if there were some kind of a process and a structure so that before you get given any money there is some kind of facilitation pipework that works out any bottlenecks in information that you might need or authority or anything like that? Would you think that that is a good idea? Or if you are going to be given grants in the future, would like to make sure that the government does whatever they can do? Because I have been looking up what the government can do with licences for these DNSPs, and it takes a while, and I am not an expert, but it looks like a lot could have been done beforehand to make it more cost efficient for you guys – that is all. I am wondering what you think about that. It is hard when there are so many people that could answer.

Simon WOODLAND: I am inclined to agree. Sorry, cut me off if I am hogging the airspace, guys, or if you want to add. Yes, I think the reference was made earlier by one of our colleagues here of how good it would be if there was a statewide strategic process and strategy here to get these charging stations in the right places and I think to, if not compel, encourage and facilitate the DNSPs to partner proactively on that process and have a clear process. Whether they can be proactive and forthcoming in heat mapping where the network constraints are and are not, so that we can at least review that before we bring them an application, that is one idea I have heard. Another would be that they actually have a business team that knows where the region and where the whole state of Victoria want to see these charging stations rolled out so that we can engage one team within AusNet, for example. AusNet is an enormous organisation, and we get passed around, basically, and told to join the queue and start from scratch.

Moira DEEMING: I think I was getting at the idea of it going with the money, you know, the facilitation, the power, the ability, so that all of those things are streamlined so that no-one even starts spending money – the fact that this has happened, council after council, the same grant, the same wasted money and to find out that there were not standards, that we are not applying standards and that there are hardware installation issues. I just, as an ordinary person, would have assumed that you would not have been asked to move forward with a project without all of that actually being settled for you. I am shocked, to be honest, that you were expected to work out every little issue along the way and stay within budget. I am just asking: do you think in the future, for every government – it is not a party political thing – that it is a good idea to make sure that there is a check process that goes through and makes sure that you have got the power, you have got the authority and that the bottlenecks that are nothing to do with you are sorted out before you actually have to spend the money to deliver the project?

Rebecca LAMBLE: Can I jump in from East Gippsland and answer that? Because local governments are very large landholders of public car parks, and we are getting community pressure, there is definitely a role for local governments to facilitate EV charging, but there currently is not a plan. At East Gippsland at the moment we are not looking at putting any more in at this stage just because of the time and effort that it has taken, but with the forecast growth in electric vehicles we do need a plan on where this is going.

Moira DEEMING: I am not arguing that at all at this stage. I am literally just saying no matter what anybody thinks about anything, I just see this one common problem with you all – that everybody has put in a lot of goodwill and effort and time and money, and there were just these facilitation issues that could have been done first. That is all.

Rebecca LAMBLE: I will jump in too. I will say we are running at a cost recovery model, so while some of our chargers have been breaking down, the rate that we are charging is high; it covers the repair costs and the electricity costs associated with the charger. We have used government grants to put the chargers in, so the return on investment is there and totally makes sense.

The CHAIR: I think Jodi just wanted to contribute as well.

Jodi KENNEDY: I just want to add too – it is not just local government having these challenges. We have got a private entity trying to put some in at San Remo, and they have literally come to us and said, ‘We can’t – we’re struggling to deal with the suppliers. Can you do it for us, because you’ve been through the process?’ So it is a whole-of-sector issue. And I think what it identified for us, significantly, is that base infrastructure is just

not there, particularly in regional locations. So you are almost starting behind because your power network and grid are so poor.

Moira DEEMING: Yes, so basically the regions are neglected – and I am not trying to be political. Okay, so they are already very, very far behind in the basic needs for electricity to begin with; then you are given a grant to do a project that you cannot deliver for very many reasons. But I think what I was trying to get at was just actually the bureaucratic issues that you have all raised. And please do not take this as a criticism of what you have done – I just feel as though you were given a job to do, you were given money to do it and it went over budget, but actually in this instance it was not really your fault because there were all these things that should have been done beforehand or concurrently so that you could use that money wisely and efficiently and not waste it.

Michelle WYATT: Through the Chair, I might just quickly say that we know when a lot of councils received that funding it was in the early stages of electric vehicle charging deployment, and the technology was relatively new and the process was relatively new. We all had great intentions, and I think we have all learned a lot through that process about how to approach a similar project again and what we would put in place before – what sort of planning we would undertake before we sought funding. That certainly has been our experience and the reason that we are taking a planned and strategic approach to try to increase our network now. We have done a lot more due diligence on locations, we have asked a lot of the questions and had them answered before we have gone to the market and before we have gone to government to seek funding so that we are in a better place now. The missing piece of the puzzle is the power supply and the cost of those upgrades and that collaboration from the DNSPs; they are not at the table at this stage, and there would be great benefit in them being a part of the discussion to help us plan the network.

Moira DEEMING: That is what I am getting at. So we as the state government license them, and those licenses can be varied. They just put a new variation in 2025 about dispute resolution. I am so sorry if I am not being articulate – I am trying to get to the point where if there is an issue like that, if you hit a bottleneck with something like that that the state government is the controlling entity of, if it is a controlled entity, we need to do our part, because that is a bottleneck, that is not your fault. You actually need the state government to smooth out those bottlenecks for you beforehand is all I am saying. So now everyone has learned I think from this experience – hopefully the government, the opposition, everybody – that when you give out money, you need to give out actual authority and power as well. I think that was best.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mrs Deeming. We have very limited time left and just me to go, so I will be really, really brief. I just wanted to hear from you all a little bit more about your perspective on what can be done to help lower income households in regional areas with the uptake of EVs. I think there is very much a perception that it is something that could be out of reach. From your view, what could be done to overcome that?

Michelle WYATT: Yes, I had better quickly answer that. I am sure everyone has the same view that that is definitely the case. There is certain – [Zoom dropout]

The CHAIR: What we might do is start in the room with you guys.

Simon WOODLAND: Yes. It is not a direct lever, but one of the main justifications council has for transitioning its fleet is that understanding that those vehicles quickly move into the second-hand market and drive that uptake. The other one is to provide affordable regional charging infrastructure and to not necessarily peg it at the highest possible cents-per-kilowatt-hour rate so that those lower income households find that affordable.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you.

Michelle WYATT: In short, our lower income households struggle, and there is a bit of fear in the community about the transition and feeling left out of it. I think support like grants and rebates would definitely help with both the charging infrastructure at home and the financial mechanisms in place to make electric vehicles more attractive as an investment – that would be very helpful. I am sure that is shared by the other councils.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Michelle. Did anyone else have anything to add to that? We are right on 1 pm, so we might leave it there. I just want to say a really big thankyou for making the time to appear before us today and answer all of our questions and for bearing with us with the technical difficulties in the room.

Witnesses withdrew.