

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Friday 15 May 2026

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

John Pesutto – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Riordan

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Jaclyn Symes MLC, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts;

Jeroen Weimar, Secretary, and

Stuart Moseley, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Building and Land Delivery, Department of Transport and Planning; and

Anne Jolic, Chief Executive Officer, Development Victoria.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and it is broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The broadcast includes automated captioning. Members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones will be live during the hearings and anything said may be picked up and captioned, even if you say it quietly.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, the Honourable Jaclyn Symes, as well as officials from the Department of Transport and Planning. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you questions. Your time starts now.

Visual presentation.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee members. As you would appreciate, I am new to the Development Victorian and precincts portfolio, so it is a pleasure to be able to present to this committee on this portfolio for the first time. My presentation today will walk through the government's major initiatives for the Development Victoria and precincts portfolio. It is very broad, so I will try and hit the highlights for you.

Development Victoria is self-funded, covering its own costs as well as generating revenue to be invested back into the state. Development Victoria is in a unique position to use its commercial capability to solve challenges and deliver community outcomes, and because it can operate counter-cyclically, it delivers projects that others simply cannot in the current economic environment. DV deliver housing and precincts and play a critical role in delivering against the government's housing statement. Its precinct projects deliver long-term urban renewal of key precincts throughout Victoria, including Fitzroy, Docklands, Fishermans Bend, Arden, Kew, Ivanhoe and Dandenong. It also delivers important precinct projects in our regions, including Ballarat and Wodonga.

The priority precincts program is delivering more homes, more jobs and more opportunities for all Victorians. These precincts are in strategic locations, offering the complete lifestyle package to live, work, play and study all close to home. In the past year we have seen the new Metro Tunnel train stations open in Parkville and Arden, with Arden Central also undergoing a request for proposal process to develop the land into a vibrant, mixed-use precinct with homes and businesses. An integrated transport plan has been established for Fishermans Bend outlining transport access to the growing precinct over three horizons, while a development contributions plan is also in the process of being finalised. Meanwhile, the start of works on the Sunshine

superhub will help turn the area into a thriving commercial hub of the west. Just recently, we worked with council to secure millions of dollars of amenity upgrades in and around Sunshine to prepare the area for the superhub's completion. We are investing in and leveraging existing infrastructure within precincts and redeveloping underutilised areas to unlock opportunities for market investment in jobs and housing, and this further informs investment by all levels of government and the private sector, as well as the not-for-profit industry, about where we can continue to develop over the next 30 years.

In metropolitan Melbourne we are working in partnership with the private sector. DV's precinct projects have contributed to delivery or future delivery of housing, including around 1400 homes, with at least 20 per cent affordable, at the Fitzroy Gasworks project. In the past 12 months residents have been welcomed into new homes in projects at Officer, Springvale, Epping and Sunshine North. Works have also started on new housing projects in Kew, Coburg and Ivanhoe.

DV directly sold over 140 homes and land lots in 2024–25, with 34 per cent of those going on incomes eligible for affordable housing and 40 per cent to first home buyers. Around 315 homes or lots were settled and completed in DV's housing projects, and DV is also overseeing the government's Small Sites program, which focuses on transforming underutilised government land into more homes for Victorians, boosting housing supply close to existing services. Following a successful pilot project of four sites, the government is running market processes for another 10 sites, led by DV, and 14 sites that have the potential to deliver up to 1000 homes in key locations, again picking up on the affordable homes initiative as well.

In relation to the regions, DV has appointed a developer for its Junction Place project in Wodonga and completed delivery of stage 2 of the Ballarat West employment zone project. They are working to support the delivery of new homes for regional Victorians by unlocking surplus land in regional hubs at Geelong, Bendigo and Morwell, with around 830 homes in planning for these sites. In Ballarat, DV is overseeing the clean-up and remediation of the former Ballarat saleyards site, unlocking and cleaning up this land, creating the potential to deliver a new employment precinct and help facilitate new homes in the longer term and support the growing region. Upgrades to Mars Stadium in Ballarat commenced on 25 February and will see the stadium upgraded with new permanent seats, raising the capacity of that venue in terms of the number of people that can attend. DV is also delivering half of the 16 projects in the government's \$550 million commitment to delivering new and upgraded sporting infrastructure projects through the regional sports infrastructure fund – projects that are located across Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Gippsland.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first 8 minutes is going to go to Mr Riordan.

Richard RIORDAN: Thank you. To the Secretary: just talking about the Suburban Rail Loop precinct and the various developer charges and so on, evidence was given earlier today that households would not be paying anything, but on your estimates on budget paper 4, page 15, under 'Suburban Rail Loop' you talk about 70,000 homes. The government has packaged up the SRL as Australia's biggest housing project. Based on those 70,000 new homes all contributing, the opposition would come up with a figure of around \$41,000 per home that would be required to cover that cost. The Grattan Institute talks of a figure in the mid-\$30,000s. What modelling have you done on how much extra per house it will cost?

Jaelyn SYMES: Just before the Secretary responds, Mr Riordan, the SRL project is not part of my portfolio, and obviously you would appreciate the Secretary would be well placed to answer this in another portfolio. But I will let the Secretary respond as he sees fit.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Riordan. I think, as the Treasurer said, we have an SRL session coming up next week, and I will be better equipped to answer the detail of your question then. I think it is fair to say that both within the precincts portfolio and the SRL portfolio we have done a number of random modelling around infrastructure contribution schemes and how they contribute to the development of funds for the local infrastructure that those communities expect. We have seen precedents around that – for example, with GAIC in the greenfield areas. We have seen precedents in Fishermans Bend, where there is a draft developer contribution scheme.

Richard RIORDAN: All right. Well, we will move on, because I have got specific questions about that. If we move to Fishermans Bend then, Fishermans Bend has been in place since 2014 or thereabouts. This government has had carriage over that over the last 12 years. Only four of the 18 projects due for completion by

2025 have happened. What faith can the community have in your development precinct program when after 12 years, of the estimated 80,000 people that Fishermans Bend could accommodate, I think there is a figure of about 10,000. We are well behind on that. That is a well-located, close-to-the-city project to house people, and yet we have seen very little movement.

Jeroen WEIMAR: Thank you, Mr Riordan. Look, as of a couple of weeks ago, we now have a \$9.5 billion pipeline of private sector housing development in the Fishermans Bend area. That includes 15,900 homes that are committed. That gets us well on our way to the housing growth target. That is 43 per cent of the housing growth target, which is 80,000 people living ultimately at Fishermans Bend.

Richard RIORDAN: But what guarantee do we have it will actually start, because it has been able to start now for the last 12 years?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, maybe I could give you another number then: 4700 dwellings are already under construction or have been delivered at this point in time.

Richard RIORDAN: Out of the 80,000?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Well, 80,000 people moving into the Fishermans Bend precinct – so a slightly lower number for the number of homes we need. We can see real development activity going in, particularly in the Montague ward. We are ahead of projections in the Montague ward, closer in to the city.

Richard RIORDAN: Do you have an average cost of, say, two- or three-bedroom units coming to market in that precinct under your current developer levies and other charges?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have that information with me right here, but what I can say is that there –

Richard RIORDAN: Have you modelled that?

Jeroen WEIMAR: We have certainly modelled the development of housing in the precinct and how we ensure that we –

Richard RIORDAN: The cost of the housing – have you modelled that? I mean, we have a housing affordability crisis, so presumably you are doing the work on what it is going to cost to bring a new home to market.

Jeroen WEIMAR: We work closely with developers to ensure we put the infrastructure in place as a department, that we ensure the land is made available –

Richard RIORDAN: What are they saying it is costing to bring two- and three-bedroom accommodations into that precinct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I will refer to Ms Jolic, who is the CEO of Development Victoria and who is overseeing Fishermans Bend and a number of other developments across the state. Again, as I said, our job is to ensure that we prepare the land and make it available. We provide the core of infrastructure to make it possible.

Richard RIORDAN: Secretary, you can do that, but if you cannot bring it to market at a price people can afford, then we are all wasting our time. Would you agree?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Sure. At this point the pipeline that we have had, the pipeline that we can see, is that of the 4700 dwellings that are being delivered or are under construction, and 680 of those are social or affordable housing units. Again, 120 those are already built or under construction. We have got a strong build-to-rent sector in there. So we can see activity on the ground, is what I am saying.

Richard RIORDAN: Yes, but what is the cost? What is your projection that a young couple, an individual or someone can get their foot in the door at? Are you providing precincts that people can afford to buy in? KPMG told us last year that the average Victorian has a mortgage capacity of about \$680,000. The industry is now saying you cannot put a two-bedroom in a high-rise together for under a million, and you cannot do a three-bedroom for much less than \$1.5 million. They are well beyond the capacity of the average Victorian. What sorts of pricepoints are you delivering to the market in this precinct?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I might at this point go to Ms Jolic. Again, I would highlight 680 social and affordable housing units in that precinct – a significant proportion. That is, what, about 15 per cent of the homes that are currently either delivered or in construction. Ms Jolic, I might just see if you have got any comments to add with your development contacts.

Anne JOLIC: Sure. Just so I am clear, Development Victoria is not delivering any housing in the Fishermans Bend precinct, but there is quite a bit of build-to-rent activity in the precinct, particularly in the Montague precinct. I think, Mr Riordan, it is a function of not just the house and land package or the apartment price but also the rental capacity of purchasers. There is quite a bit of build-to-rent product as well.

Richard RIORDAN: We know in the Victorian context build to rent by and large is not for low-income and average-income earners, is it?

Anne JOLIC: Some of it can be depending on the product type.

Richard RIORDAN: Is it being provided in this precinct?

Anne JOLIC: I do not know.

Richard RIORDAN: Okay. I would respectfully suggest that if you do not know, it is a problem. Just quickly, with the minute we have got, the Fishermans Bend precinct has been held back by a lack of public transport for 12 years. Are there any firm commitments for sophisticated and capable public transport into an area that can hold 80,000 people?

Jaclyn SYMES: Just on that, Mr Riordan, I had the opportunity in the early days of being appointed to the role to visit Fishermans Bend and literally having things pointed out to me about the future opportunities. You asked specifically about the transport planning. The *Connecting Fishermans Bend: Integrated Transport Plan* was published only in September.

Richard RIORDAN: But when are we going to see something?

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, you have got to –

Richard RIORDAN: For 12 years you have not done anything.

Jaclyn SYMES: This was published in September 2025, planning and identifying where the suite of transport initiatives can be delivered, and it will evolve over three delivery horizons. Transport investment will be staged and aligned to the forecast demands linked to growth in jobs and populations.

Richard RIORDAN: Okay, give us a sense of that horizon? Two years, three years, 10 years, 15 years – what is the horizon?

Jaclyn SYMES: First of all, there are already bus services being delivered in this precinct; 1500 additional bus services per week to Fishermans Bend have been rolled out since 2022.

Richard RIORDAN: What about the tram? Where is the tram?

Jaclyn SYMES: Improving frequency, reliability and service coverage of the area is being filled by buses at the moment.

Richard RIORDAN: And trams?

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to future planning, a lot of that will be available for you to read in the publication that was issued in September 2025.

Richard RIORDAN: So there is no firm plan on fixed infrastructure public transport?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, there is an integrated transport plan that will be delivered in tranches, and we have delivered and financed buses to serve that community at this point in time.

Richard RIORDAN: So for the foreseeable future buses only?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, there are the horizons that have been identified in that plan, which also includes new tram routes connecting Fishermans Bend to the CBD via Southbank.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister, Secretary and officials. Just to begin with at the outset, the 'Department Performance Statement' outputs, page 145, outlines the \$74.3 million investment forecast for this portfolio over the coming financial year. Minister, could you please outline what this funding will achieve and in what specific projects as well?

Jaclyn SYMES: I can see the slides were quite busy in terms of the amount of projects that have been delivered around the state. Before coming to the portfolio I think I had an underappreciation of the amount of work that is generated from this portfolio in terms of projects for a growing state. It is worthwhile work, particularly about making sure that we are capitalising and creating economic and social benefits through this portfolio.

I think one of the topics that we were covering off with Mr Riordan was Fishermans Bend and the opportunities there, but I might skip to some of the others and come back to Fishermans Bend if we have got time, because the other site where I have been on the ground – actually above ground, because we stood in an adjacent building so that we could see the whole precinct – is that of Arden. I was there a couple of weeks ago, because it is a major urban renewal project which is in a well-connected and growing part of the inner city of Melbourne, particularly complemented by the Metro Tunnel. Just 2 minutes by train from Parkville's hospitals, university and research institutes and two stops from the Melbourne CBD, it is a really ideally positioned place to deliver quality and affordable housing for a broad range of residents and obviously particularly attractive to key workers because of the position that it sits in. Arden central site itself is approximately 12 hectares. That is government-owned land all around Arden station, and it is expected to accommodate at least 3500 homes, with an initial 1000 in the first stage by 2030. Importantly, again, I think as with some of the topics we picked up on in my previous portfolios, there is a real focus on affordable housing, at least 10 per cent affordable housing in this region, picking up on Mr Riordan's point about making sure that we are providing opportunities for a broad range of people. Long term, DTP is projecting up to 20,000 additional residents and 34,000 jobs by around 2050 in this region.

The Sunshine precinct is I know of interest to particular members as well. It is currently the focus of joint investment of more than \$4.1 billion by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments, delivering a program of works between West Footscray and Albion. We talked about that untangling of the rail junction, but we are really making sure it can capitalise also on the future electrification of Melton. DTP is leading the strategic coordination and planning of this priority precinct. From a precincts perspective we want to unlock the full benefits of this site. We want to ensure that we are well positioned to attract investment, and obviously if we get this right, housing and jobs are expected to boom in Sunshine. DTP is projecting an anticipated 16,000 new homes and 29,000 new jobs in this high-growth scenario.

The other project that was on the screen, Mr Galea, is in Kew. Development Victoria is transforming surplus government land into a new residential community in that part of the state. It is happening on the old VicRoads site, which is no longer in use and was declared surplus in 2024. Just yesterday it was announced that Lendlease have been selected to be the preferred developer to partner with DV in transforming that site into a thriving new inner-city neighbourhood, and thanks to our planning reforms and establishment of the Kew activity centre, the project can increase its contributions to the Victorian housing market. The original plan to deliver 500 homes has been boosted to 600 homes. So there is a lot of activity happening in some pretty significant areas of the state. I am happy to continue talking, but you look like you are ready to ask me the next question.

Michael GALEA: I am. I have just wandered up and seen the thing above that item actually, which is Pick My Park. But I will say the Arden precinct obviously, aside from being close to the city, is also directly connected to electorates like mine thanks to the Metro Tunnel as well, which obviously expands the opportunity out of it. But you rightly have observed that my eye has wandered up the budget paper slightly to the Pick My Park program.

Jaclyn SYMES: I know you were paying attention, sorry.

Michael GALEA: I was paying close attention, Minister. In particular, I see that it is a new performance target outlined of 90 per cent of projects having the funding provided in a short space of time to successful recipients. Can you talk to me a little bit about this program and how it can benefit communities across the state, and particularly in my electorate as well?

Jaclyn SYMES: Just to clarify, are you talking about Pick My Park?

Michael GALEA: Yes.

Jaclyn SYMES: A great initiative that I have had the benefit of inheriting, because it is just so important for so many communities that I know talk to local members of Parliament about having these facilities in their local communities. It was in February that my predecessor announced \$17.8 million in funding as part of the overall Pick My Park program, which was \$30 million for 97 projects through initial rounds. There will be 14 new parks, and 83 park upgrades were announced just recently. The Pick My Park project is obviously unique because it invited communities to have their say and therefore they responded accordingly, and eligible suburbs were across Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong. The Engage Victoria website was where the community were asked for their input about how funding should be spent in their area and whether it was to be an upgrade or better utilising existing parks or indeed where they identified open urban spaces, for example, that could be transformed into parks.

The investment through Pick My Park is also really keen to identify inclusive, accessible and sustainable places. We really have different standards these days in relation to the products that we should be producing so that they are available for all members of the community. As Victoria continues to grow, we certainly take the view that we need to grow well. Parks and open spaces are essential for public health and community connection. That is why the program targeted the established areas where new homes are being built, including around the SRL and priority precincts and activity centres. It has been quite popular, and I think we will probably expand the criteria going forward so that more and more communities can put their hand up for these supports. The program does also complement the housing statement that has been a bit of a feature in relation to housing investment across the last couple of hours that we have been chatting. High-quality public green spaces in high-density areas are certainly central to our commitment to deliver more homes. Those homes that we want to build closer to transport, jobs and services through initiatives such as the train and tram activity centre program, we basically want people to live in places where they get to enjoy the amenity, and we know that parks and open spaces and play equipment and exercise equipment and things go a really long way to doing that.

I think you were interested in your region, and I am sure we can put on record projects that you have championed and worked with your community on. My advice is that South-Eastern Metropolitan Region was successful in nine projects, providing a total investment of \$1,655,000, ranging from renewing and expanding playgrounds with nature-based play elements – which are my personal favourite, the nature-based ones – to accessible paths, plantings and additional shade. This was across suburbs that included Mulgrave and Frankston. Probably after nature-based playgrounds, my next favourite is fenced dog parks. I have got a whippet that is not great on recall.

Michael GALEA: You would need a very good fence for that.

Jaclyn SYMES: So having off-leash dog parks are really important to many, many dog owners, particularly if their dogs are not well behaved. So I certainly thank local members and members of the community who have advocated for a number of the local projects, and I look forward to getting out there in my new portfolio and seeing some of these projects delivered in real life, because they are providing a lot of community benefit, and it is nice to get that feedback when communities have advocated for something and we are in a position to be able to support them with funding for those important projects.

Michael GALEA: Absolutely. Another exciting part of your new portfolio is the Growing Suburbs Fund. I was recently out at the Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House in Berwick, which was a recipient of a grant. They are a terrific neighbourhood house doing great things with the money that they have received as part of that fund. Can you talk to me a little bit about that and the performance metric outlined in 'Department Performance Statement', page 144?

Jaclyn SYMES: I would be delighted to, Mr Galea, because my briefings in the new portfolio have informed me that there are 88 projects that are currently in delivery, supporting growing communities where demand is the highest. The program has built important infrastructure for suburbs that are just being established, such as multipurpose community centres, learning centres, cultural centres, sport and recreation facilities, parks, playgrounds and open spaces and active transport and trails. We know particularly those local council areas that are trying to plan for the growth but do not necessarily have the rate base prior to it are needing the infrastructure. That is something that this fund has been able to really recognise and provide in advance of that growth as best as possible.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Treasurer. Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I will start off with Fitzroy Gasworks. Can I ask: will the affordable housing at that precinct be classed as affordable in perpetuity?

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Mr Puglielli, for your question. I have advice on every project, so just let me find Fitzroy. In relation to the social and affordable housing that is going to be delivered at that site, the precinct will have approximately 1400 homes, where 20 per cent are designated as affordable. They will be delivered across the site by 33 per cent in parcel A – and I can get you a map of some of these things if you need.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, that would be great.

Jaclyn SYMES: Because obviously I am talking about parcels, and it is a bit hard to envision it. But 33 per cent of parcel A will be offered as affordable build-to-rent housing, and 10 per cent of those are designated for First People. Parcels B and C include 121 social homes to be managed by a registered housing provider and made available as social rental homes for a minimum of 40 years, going to your point around the longevity of these investments and the intentions of affordable and social housing in perpetuity. Parcels B and C include 53 affordable rental homes made available as low- or moderate-income housing, maintained for a minimum period of 20 years, and parcels B and C include 32 homes sold at cost under a Nightingale model, with priority access to eligible buyers and key workers. Aboriginal Housing Victoria will allocate and manage 10 per cent of the social and affordable housing prioritised for access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. So there are some inbuilt protections for ensuring that these can be retained for the purposes that they have been built.

Jeroen WEIMAR: We will be signing those this year.

Jaclyn SYMES: The Secretary just wanted to make sure that I put on record that developers have been appointed and permits are being sought, and parcel B works are expected to commence by mid-2026 and parcels A and C by 2027.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Beyond those periods that you have mentioned – 40 years and 20 years for those different allotments – what happens to those homes after that period?

Anne JOLIC: I might take that question. The developers are obviously contractually obligated as a minimum to meet those requirements. We will continue to talk to those developers. We have control over that precinct. What we tend to find with this is we continue to talk to the developers over time, and as that period expires, we would look to strike new agreements or consider what their options are for that site. There is a large portion of build-to-rent also across that precinct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, with the intention that it remains affordable?

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Puglielli. We are out of time. Minister and officials, thank you very much for taking the time to appear before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a break before beginning its consideration of the portfolio of the Premier of Victoria at 2 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.