Mr Nathan Bunt  
Executive Officer  
Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee  
Parliament Victoria  
Spring Street,  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Bunt

INQUIRY INTO GROWING THE SUBURBS: INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN OUTER SUBURBAN MELBOURNE

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry. The Department of Sustainability and Environment’s submission focuses on water infrastructure, public land, biodiversity and waste related issues. The submission relates to the following three specific areas raised in the Terms of Reference:

   a) Identification of existing public and private infrastructure provision, including schools, hospitals, commercial and shopping precincts, transport and roads, telecommunications, water and power.

   b) Assessment of the capacity of existing infrastructure to accommodate increased population growth.

   c) Investigation of options, based on intrastate, interstate and international evidence, which reduce pressure on infrastructure and essential services.

Water infrastructure

The Victorian Government’s Urban Water Reform Program

The Living Victoria Ministerial Advisory Council was appointed by the Government to advise on integrated water policy for Living Melbourne, Living Victoria. A Roadmap was produced in March with high level objectives around water use and planning. A further detailed implementation plan was also produced, which is currently being considered by government.

The council has recognised that there needs to be close links between urban planning and water infrastructure planning, and that there needs to be community involvement in making these decisions.

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Population growth and existing infrastructure

Part of the government’s election commitments under Living Melbourne, Living Victoria, was to ensure Melbourne’s water supplies could withstand continued population growth without the need for continued large infrastructure investments. A core part of this is increasing resilience in the water system (for example by undertaking a flexible approach that takes into account localised context and diversifies Melbourne’s water services). This will include a mix of centralised and decentralised solutions which are better able to adapt to challenges such as population growth and climate variability.

It is important to plan for this mix of solutions in an integrated manner at the planning stages of development, as opportunities to maximise benefits are greatest when considered at the earliest stages of planning. Growth in the outer Melbourne growth suburbs therefore provides an excellent opportunity to maximise benefits to the community through a more innovative and tailored approach to the planning and delivery of water services. To achieve this, the council recommends that better planning processes that integrate water and urban planning are required. This will involve active collaboration between all key stakeholders, and across government, to ensure that multiple benefits are achieved (e.g. improved urban amenity, reduced cost).

Providing water, sewerage and drainage infrastructure in growth areas in the traditional manner will result in unsustainable increases in demand, and as such a need for further augmentations resulting in larger water bills.

Integrated water cycle management as an option in growth areas

The government’s Living Melbourne, Living Victoria policy has a strong focus on using currently under-utilised sources of water to meet Melbourne’s needs.

Integrated water cycle management is an option that links components including decentralised and distributed options (e.g. stormwater, local recycling, groundwater and rainwater tanks) with traditional centralised facilities, as well as market-based solutions, demand side and efficiency solutions, and linking urban development processes with water outcomes.

There is an opportunity to address many of the water-related issues in growth areas, with the potential to move away from more traditional water, sewerage and drainage infrastructure provision, to providing a more integrated solution. Integrated solutions can reduce costs, and ensure liveability and resilience is built into new growth areas. These types of solutions can reduce growth in demand, as well as costs to the householders.

The Living Melbourne, Living Victoria Ministerial Advisory Council advocates the use of such integrated solutions in growth areas to ensure that opportunities for improved water management are not foregone. The benefits of such an approach include a potential to reduce costs, increase liveability, provide more options for stakeholders and the community – targeting investment to achieve multiple benefits.

Future uncertainties, including a changing climate and population growth, mean we need to focus on building the resilience of our water systems, by developing a broader range of water sources and ensuring resources are used optimally.
Other considerations

Note that the Department of Planning and Community Development is currently undertaking a strategic utility capacity analysis for metropolitan Melbourne (assisted by GHD Australia). The project area incorporates the thirty one metropolitan local government areas within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and a portion of Mitchell Shire Council which also falls within the UGB.

The purpose of the study is to provide an understanding of the constraints and opportunities in the utility infrastructure network, to provide guidance as to areas that have service capacity for development and areas that may require additional infrastructure in order to make them suitable for future development.

Case study information

The committee may wish to consider the following examples of developments that incorporate some level of integrated water cycle planning:

- Toolern
- Armstrong Creek
- Kalkallo
- Doncaster Hill
- Eynesbury
- Areas providing recycled water for non potable uses to households.

Public land

Open space

Public land plays an important role as ‘public infrastructure’. It is set aside for a variety of purposes, including state and national parks, natural feature reserves, water production areas, community use (recreation, parks and gardens), and service and utilities (road, rail, hospitals, water services, etc).

Local public open space (parks and reserves) is a key element in attracting and retaining residents and supporting residents’ health and wellbeing in suburban areas.

Links to regional public open space (opposed to local open space) are also important. Although not provided by local government, there is often an expectation that communities will have access to regional open space (National and State parks and forest areas).

The review should note that if not provided for in the planning phase, there is a significant cost to acquiring public space, which usually has to be purchased at market rates.

The Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation Final Report (2011) was prepared by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) identifies and assesses the existing and appropriate future uses of Crown land within the metropolitan context. It also looks at the contribution public land provides to Melbourne’s liveability. The committee may
wish to consider the relevant information paper, noting that government is yet to formally respond to the recommendations of the report.

Community facilities

As noted above, public land is set aside for a variety of purposes, in some cases for community facilities such as community halls, art spaces, sport facilities and libraries. Provision of space for cultural infrastructure needs to be planned for to enable facilities to evolve within the communities as needed.

As noted above, the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation Final Report (2011) will provide relevant information to assist in your inquiry.

Road and rail reserves

While VicRoads and VicTrack will be able to assist with information on the capacity of existing infrastructure and future needs, it should be noted that the VEAC Remnant Vegetation Investigation Final Report (2011) provides management and biodiversity background relevant to road and rail reserves.

Biodiversity

In considering the development (housing, infrastructure, etc) of growth areas and the provision of infrastructure it is often necessary to balance biodiversity outcomes.

The committee should note the draft Growth Corridor Plans released on 22 November 2011 by the Growth Areas Authority (GAA). The Department of Sustainability and Environment have been working with the GAA in integrating biodiversity conservation strategies into the growth corridor plans, providing not only for the protection of biodiversity but creation of open space.

Other Considerations

Waste volumes are increasing with population growth in Melbourne and in growth areas, which highlights the need to do more to reduce the volume of waste being disposed to landfill. The committee may wish to consider capacity issues with the existing infrastructure and implications for the development of new facilities. The committee may wish to speak with the Environment Protection Authority regarding the current and future infrastructure requirements for waste management.

Thank you for raising this matter with the Ministers.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Greg Wilson
Secretary