

Submission

From the Goldfields Voluntary Organisation of Councils
(GVROC) to Infrastructure WA

Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow:
Draft State Infrastructure Strategy

September 2021



Contents

Contact Us:.....	2
About Us.....	3
Introduction.....	3
General Comments.....	4
Sector Comments.....	8
Transport and Logistics Infrastructure.....	8
Road network.....	8
Rail network.....	9
Aviation facilities.....	9
Maritime facilities.....	9
Service Infrastructure.....	9
Digital and telecommunications infrastructure.....	9
Utilities (Energy & Water).....	10
Waste management.....	10
Social and Affordable Housing.....	10
Soft Infrastructure.....	11
Primary and Secondary Education.....	11
Higher Education and Vocational Training Education.....	11
Health Care.....	11
Specific Recommendation Comments.....	11
In Conclusion.....	13

Contact Us:

If you wish to discuss the GVROC submission, please contact either:

Malcolm Cullen – GVROC Chair
E: shire.president@coolgardie.wa.gov.au
M: 0417 266 191

or

Andrew Mann – GVROC Executive Officer
E: mannadvisory@bigpond.com
M: 0403 447 303
A: A: 459 Albany Highway, Victoria Park, WA, 6100

About Us

The Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils (GVROC) was formed in 2007, with the overarching principle to develop a strategic alliance of Local Governments in the Goldfields, who contribute and work together to ensure development and retention of infrastructure and community services and undertake joint economic development initiatives, through grant funding with the State and Federal governments plus the private sector, to enhance the region.

It consists of the:

- Shire of Coolgardie
- Shire of Dundas
- Shire of Esperance
- City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
- Shire of Laverton
- Shire of Leonora
- Shire of Menzies
- Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku
- Shire of Wiluna



The GVROC also look to enhance service delivery and infrastructure for its collective and individual communities and to achieve a sustainable, cost-effective model for sharing of resources.

Introduction

The GVROC appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to Infrastructure WA to provide specific feedback on the draft State Infrastructure Strategy – Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow, and to the strategy's recommendations that relate to regional development.

Local Governments have a significant role in the planning and provision of infrastructure in the regions alongside the State and Federal Governments. In that respect the operations and responsibilities of the GVROC Local Governments intersect with most of the themes identified in Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow, and most of the Sector specific considerations.

The GVROC is of the opinion that the draft State Infrastructure Strategy, proposes a well-structured approach to identifying opportunities and challenges with respect to the provision of infrastructure. The GVROC also supports the overall approach of a Strategic Framework used to guide the development of the State Infrastructure Strategy.

However, while the focus on achieving a balance between the economic, social and environmental objectives of infrastructure provision is welcomed, there also needs to be equity and understanding of infrastructure requirements and provision in regional Western Australia against the Perth and Peel metropolitan area, especially given that most of regional Western Australia is the backbone of the Western Australian economy. This includes the GVROC region, which covers more than a third of the State and produces a substantial portion of the State's GDP, predominantly from the booming mining sector, yet does not receive the same equitable portion of funding towards provision of critical infrastructure that promotes further economic growth for the State from the region.

The GVROC are also aligned and supportive of the WALGA submission that has been presented as part of this process on behalf of all local governments that includes comments around the impacts and issues that the recommendations will have for local governments going forward.

Further to the WALGA submission, the GVROC provides the following general comments and more specific comments in relation to the regional development recommendations on the Draft State Infrastructure Strategy.

General Comments

Strategic Issues on Regional Development

The objective to “maximise regional strengths to unlock strategic opportunities for Western Australia”, does not currently translate to the State Government investing in the growth and investment of regional communities.

A population growth target is set for Perth/Peel but not for regional WA. The strategy should contain stronger commitments to support, encourage and drive population growth in regional WA, particularly for the GVROC region (Refer p28 and p93). Further to this, there needs to be more focus on reducing FIFO work forces, by planning and providing infrastructure in regional cities that is on par with Perth, which would encourage workers to reside in the regions, in turn value adding to the regional local economies and not to the metropolitan areas where they currently reside, and ultimately subsidising those urban areas. By increasing the population into the regions, it will also lesson the need to expand and upgrade infrastructure in the metropolitan areas and Perth to cope with the projected increase in population.

The Strategy also states on p33 ‘... Alternative service models have been established resulting in efficient and effective infrastructure and services in areas experiencing population decline.’ This statement is not representative of the GVROC region's experience, with smaller regional towns now having service models that have been centralised in Perth affecting the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of the infrastructure and services available in those communities. The draft Strategy must ensure that there is equity of access to critical infrastructure and services for all small local governments.

The strategy also does not articulate or commit to a broadened or weighted 'evaluation methodology' (p39) for remote regional WA. Economic and State-wide benefit criteria are traditionally difficult to meet for many remote regional communities.

There is also limited information around the Goldfields/ Esperance region (2 pages) within the strategy and most of this just highlights challenges. There needs to be more detail included in the strategy for each region to get real traction on infrastructure that will make a difference and promote economic growth in the regions.

The GVROC is supportive of the regional hub and spoke model, utilising the City of Kalgoorlie and Shire of Esperance as the hubs for the Goldfields region. State Government should invest into hub infrastructure that will support economic growth in the region and also support and sustain all the surrounding Goldfields regional towns and communities (the spokes). It is important that the spoke areas also have investment in connectivity, housing, industry, etc. so they complement the hubs in developing growth. However, there is currently little detail on how the State Government through this strategy would prioritise investment under this approach.

As a key region for the mining sector and its contribution to the State economy, the GVROC also believes that minerals prospectivity through exploration sets the tone for the future of the mining industry and this requires greater emphasis within the draft strategy i.e. no exploration – no mining industry.

Projects and Funding

A large proportion of the States GDP and revenue comes from within the Goldfields region; however, the same equitable percentage is not returned in funding to assist the Goldfields communities with development of infrastructure needed to grow the region and its population.

When GVROC Local Governments have requested funding for projects in the past (e.g. the airfield at Laverton) the State Government currently tends to identify many of these as industry specific rather than Government, and therefore advise that funding should be from the industry sector, which in most cases for the Goldfields is the mining industry. What the Governments (both State & Federal) fail to recognise is that the mining companies pay a significant amount of royalties to the State and Federal Governments already and in some small regional Local Governments also contribute most of their rate income. If it wasn't for these mining companies, most of these smaller Local Governments wouldn't be able to survive. Therefore, the government/s should change their approach and look to contribute equitable investment into infrastructure in these mining regions based on the GDP contribution that these local government areas contribute to the State economy.

Currently remote resource regions also tend to be excluded from ad-hoc government infrastructure funding opportunities, as the State and Federal Governments investment normally goes towards meeting its political commitments and agenda, e.g. being re-elected and addressing marginal seats.

This scenario leaves remote resource communities with small populations and voters, to look at alternative and competitive funding applications as the only way of addressing its community infrastructure requirements, which come at a high cost to the community and generally with minimal success.

While it is understood the draft strategy's focus has been towards looking at and changing the policy direction to infrastructure development in the State, there is also a need to include some key infrastructure projects for each region that have the potential to enhance the State's economy and open up the regions. The draft strategy currently has very minimal regional projects listed, with none in the Goldfields region.

Within the GVROC and by its local government council members, various documents have been produced that would assist in looking at key infrastructure projects and investment in the Goldfields region that will help growth in the region. These include:

- GVROC Economic Position Paper for the Region
- Growing Kalgoorlie-Boulder Growth Plan
- Planning our Future – A Growth Plan for Esperance and the Southeast Region
- Northern Goldfields Economic and Investment Prospectus
- Shire of Dundas Investment Prospectus.

On top of these plans is the requirement that every Local Government has to produce a Strategic Community Plan supported by an Asset Management Plan and Long-Term Financial Plan. All these documents set out the medium and long-term plans for each Local Government Area, and particularly focus on the upgrade, renewal and development of infrastructure required to deliver services to their local communities.

The GVROC considers it is important that the Draft State Infrastructure Strategy should make explicit how these local level plans will align with or feed into the State strategy. These documents all need to be considered by State Government when developing a strategic assessment for future infrastructure projects in the Goldfields.

Copies of any of the above-mentioned plans produced by the GVROC local governments can be provided to Infrastructure WA upon request.

Remote Aboriginal Communities

The GVROC agrees in principle with the recommendations in the Strategy, however, believe significant investment is required in remote aboriginal communities in the short term to meet one of its major Strategic Objectives – *“That, WA support Aboriginal business development, economic participation, and social outcomes, including essential services for remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves.”*

Specific short-term investment in infrastructure such as the following is required in the Goldfields remote aboriginal communities:

- Waste Facilities – Kerbside pickup, landfills and transfer stations for smaller communities
- Telecommunications – 4G access, access to fibre optic that traverses the Great Central Road.

- Community Housing – Community and Staff
- Public Health infrastructure
- Justice and Public Safety – Police staff housing for additional staffs, Fire and Emergency services infrastructure
- Community Facilities
 - Recreation Centres
 - Swimming Pools
 - Ovals

The GVROC also believe the Draft Strategy lacks specifics for projects and planning of infrastructure in remote aboriginal communities. The Strategy talks about the need to support essential services for remote communities; however, it doesn't go into specifics about projects.

The GVROC is also concerned about the timeframes proposed, as the first 5 years (2022 – 2027) focus on non-building options, and then the following 5 years focus on projects already in the system. The remote aboriginal communities can't wait that long for projects to be planned and delivered. The essential services in our region's remote aboriginal communities such as Waste and Telecommunications are simply not available and pose significant health and safety risks to our community now.

As an example, the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku currently needs investment in its telecommunication infrastructure. The Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku is located in a remote Aboriginal community in Warburton, WA. The Shire requires broadband and 4G mobile services for the community to conduct daily operations outside of the Shire. This level of access is also essential for health and safety as the Great Central Road is the third east / west access across Australia.

In Warburton they have access to ADSL1 which is totally congested, a Telstra phone exchange that is at its limit and 4G mobile service that is also congested later in the day when school age children and parents are home. Most other surrounding remote communities only have 3G access and Telstra can't advise what will happen when they switch off that system. In between townsites there is no service, which is very difficult especially given the vast distances and remoteness of the area, and requirements for health and safety.

The following infrastructure services are required:

- basic phone system is provided but an upgrade of the exchanges is required in all locations where it is fully utilised.
- 4G network with appropriate data bandwidths for all locations
- Access to the fibre optic which traverses the Great Central Road e.g. Access sits in a pit in Warburton township but can only afford to be accessed by State Government Department's with deep pockets.
The Shire would be willing to pay the capex cost of towers and microwave point to point fibre optic but the ongoing monthly access fee by Telstra is prohibitive.

- As the fibre traverses this road it could also be accessed to provide telecommunications to users of the road similar to what has been done between Halls Creek and Kununurra using the radio tower network.
- NBN Skymuster was ok but of late it seems to also get congested, and reception seems much less reliable.
- Starlink is a development we are watching as it has potential with less latency, higher bandwidth and reasonable rates for larger data plans.

In January 2020 this lack of telecommunications infrastructure was highlighted when the Eyre Highway was closed in WA due to fires, at the same time the Great Northern Highway was closed due to floods in the Kimberley wet season. As the Great Central Road was the only east / west road access available people used it to return to WA after the Christmas break. There was then heavy rain from Kimberley tail end rains that turned the road into mud as it is not bituminised. At the same time the Telstra landline and mobile networks went down in SA as a telephone exchange there had battery backup failures.

This also took out the line into parts of eastern WA including the Shire on a weekend, which resulted in no telecommunications. Therefore, the Shire were unable to contact the NT side to advise them to put up road closed signs to stop directing tourists to get bogged. When tourists did battle their way through, when they arrived in town for fuel, food, and accommodation, they were told there were no phone lines so no Eftpos for ATM / Credit cards and only cash could be accepted.

This also created havoc in the local community because the phones were down for several weeks, which resulted in community members not being able to report to Centrelink, so their Centrelink payments were cut off, prisoners who were out on good behaviour bonds could not do their phone ins with police and were now in default of their bail conditions.

Thus, it is vitally important that investment into remote community infrastructure is provided in the short-term and not forced to wait five to ten years while a regional development strategic framework is produced.

Sector Comments

The GVROC has developed an Economic Plan for the Region that has identified a number of key issues around key sector infrastructure for the region as outlined below. The GVROC would like to see the Draft Strategic Plan consider these key issues and infrastructure requirements as appropriate.

Transport and Logistics Infrastructure

Road network

Consideration given to ensure the region can:

- Maintain the standard of main arterial roads;
- Improve the standard of key non-arterial roads;

- Make improvements for heavy vehicle traffic through Esperance into the Esperance Port;
- Address the increased heavy vehicle traffic through townships; and
- Manage the activation of isolated communities and economies.

As an example of the above, there are a number of regional towns, including several in the Goldfields, that have major State highways that run through the middle of them, that cause significant safety issues for all road users.

As an example, Bayley Street in Coolgardie presents a very significant community safety challenge insofar as residents and tourists clash with light vehicles and heavy haulage vehicles 24/7. With COVID-19, this issue has also been amplified with an influx of Western Australians and tourists from other states and territories travelling within the State for holidays via the regional roads due to them unable to fly interstate or overseas for holidays. The GVROC would like to see the Draft Strategy consider these important thoroughfares and State highways and recommend to the State Government the need for adequate funding to maintain and make these roads of strategic importance safe for all users.

Rail network

Consideration towards the rail network to address:

- Potentially increasing rail freight;
- High network costs;
- Potential congestion at the Aurizon Kalgoorlie Yard and Esperance;
- Kalgoorlie-rail realignment and multi-modal capability; and
- An upgrade to the rail infrastructure in the Northern Goldfields and Esperance lines to accommodate resource sector development.

Aviation facilities

Consideration towards the regions LGA controlled airports to:

- Address maintenance and expansion of the Kalgoorlie Airport;
- Upgrades to Laverton and Kambalda airports; and
- Airstrip upgrades to Wiluna and Eucla airports.

Maritime facilities

Consideration towards the Esperance Port to:

- Investigate the Esperance Port land constraints and options for expansion; and
- Maintain and invest in new capital infrastructure at the Esperance Port.

Service Infrastructure

Digital and telecommunications infrastructure

Improve the digital and telecommunications infrastructure in the region by:

- Continuing to eliminate Mobile 'Blackspots';

- Facilitation of real-time data intensive services; and
- Partnering with the WA SuperNet plan which involves running 4000km of optic fibre, buried within the easements of the regional rail network stretching from Northampton to Esperance.

Utilities (Energy & Water)

Maintain and upgrade utilities to the region by:

- Improved natural gas distribution and pipeline access;
- Increasing electricity generation and distribution including support for the development of alternative power sources, i.e. Renewable Hydrogen, Solar and / or wind:
 - Ensuring energy security on the SWIS;
 - Upgrading electricity supply;
- Improving water supply to address potable water scarcity and cost including:
 - Drought proofing infrastructure, particularly in the Rangelands area of GVROC;
 - possible support for development of a water pipeline from Argyle to Kalgoorlie via inland towns; and/or
 - desalination plant in Esperance and piping though the Goldfields rather than a reliance on water solely from Perth.
- Increasing capacity of water for agriculture/ commercial activities; and
- Potential deregulation of water supply to allow commercial suppliers to enter the market.

Waste management

The GVROC supports the Shire of Coolgardie's approach to the Circular Economy, with the Shire providing leadership in the region in respect to the development of Class 3 Regional Waste Facility located in Coolgardie. This will include rubber and plastics recycling either via shredding and/or pyrolysis.

The development of such regional waste facilities is critical in protecting our health, environment, and the liveability of our regional communities and also addresses and the States waste reduction and recovery targets. The GVROC would like the strategy to highlight the Shire's proposed project, which demonstrates best practice and foresight.

Social and Affordable Housing

Local Government has the capacity to raise capital through WA Treasury Corporation for innovative, sustainable and affordable housing opportunities to help close the gap in what has traditionally been a State Government responsibility.

It is within that context that the GVROC supports the Goldfields-Esperance region being identified for conducting an initial plan pilot as highlighted within the draft Strategy.

Soft Infrastructure

Primary and Secondary Education

Solutions developed towards addressing the:

- Limited childcare supply; and
- Decreasing secondary school retention.

Higher Education and Vocational Training Education

Solutions towards:

- Optimisation of the education and training precinct in Kalgoorlie-Boulder;
- Infrastructure that allows better integration of Regional specific training; and
- Implementation and integration of new curriculums to meet regional needs.

Health Care

Provision of health infrastructure that:

- Meets the needs of aged care in the regions;
- Meets the increasing demand for mental health services;
- Retains general practitioners in the region;
- Delivers upgrades to Laverton, Leonora and Norseman Hospitals;
- Sustains culturally secure health care delivery;
- Delivers aging in place housing and health care;
- Ensures adequate paramedic capability; and
- Maintains critical mass of demand for local health care services.

Specific Recommendation Comments

Recommendation 17 - Develop and implement a regional development strategic framework that identifies state and regional priorities.

While the GVROC agrees for the need for a consistent framework for regional development, the timeframes being proposed in the draft strategy are effectively stating that no funding or development will occur for the next five years while the framework is developed and further investigation on projects and research is completed.

The GVROC believes that a lot of the research and investigation has already been done over the last 10 years and many are tired of being over consulted in the regions with little to show for this research and investigation. Incoming governments seem to disregard previous work, due only to political reasons of not wanting to agree with the outgoing governments policies, rather than valid strategic reasons.

The GVROC request that the following regional plans, which have already been developed, should form the basis of any review and development of a new framework that can bring these documents up to date taking no more than 12 months rather than the proposed 5 years.

- State Government's Regional Development Strategy – 2015
- Goldfields Regional Planning and Infrastructure Framework (2015)
- Goldfields Esperance Regional Investment Blueprint (2016)
- Regional Centres Development Plan – City of Kalgoorlie Boulder (2016)
- Supertowns Growth Plan – Esperance (2011)

The feeling in the regional local communities is that by the time the 5-year review, as is proposed in this draft strategy recommendation, is over another State election will have passed and there is the potential for this process to start again as there currently appears no bi-partisan support for infrastructure development in WA.

The GVROC also believe that the approach for the Regional Development Strategic Framework (p100 of the Draft Strategy) as put forward is much more complex than for Perth/Peel given the diverse nature of the various regions. This is also another reason why the review of each regions existing plans should be looked at to ensure any new regional framework meets the needs of each region.

Recommendation 18 - Improve transparency on regional investment by reporting in the State Budget on all government regional expenditure and its geographic distribution.

The GVROC strongly concurs with this recommendation. This has been a long-standing issue with the State Budget reporting occurring over many decades. This is particularly an issue within larger Departments that budget and report against Functions, Programs and Projects only and not locality.

Transparency within the Royalties for Regions Fund is also needed. Not only the separation between Recurrent and Capital funds reported is required but also between the use of all state government funding, including this fund on existing and new projects/programs is required. The initial intent of the Royalties for Regions Fund was to supplement (not supplant) existent regional State Government investment into infrastructure and services, however the transparency of this has been blurred in recent times.

This recommendation will enable taxpayers and regional residents to monitor what the true level of regional expenditure is and how much is provided through the Royalties for Regions Fund and what is outside of this fund.

Recommendation 19. - Develop and implement a regional service and infrastructure framework across WA's diverse regional centres, including:

- a) State-level settings to facilitate cross-sectoral planning and coordination of services and infrastructure.**
- b) Regional centre level settings to facilitate place-based approaches, and co-design and collocation of services and infrastructure.**
- c) A social services and infrastructure needs assessment.**

GVROC is broadly supportive of the intent of this recommendation.

In principle, an approach that allows for greater local input into service design and the provision of integrated place-based models will be a positive step to ensure that services are targeted towards the needs of individual communities.

However, the model proposed in the Draft Strategy requires further consultation with relevant stakeholders – including Local Governments – to ensure that it delivers improved outcomes for local communities.

Resourcing will also be a critical consideration for developing a new regional service delivery model. To the extent that Local Governments are expected to play a greater role in facilitating and supporting place-based integrated service models, adequate funding must be provided to the sector to deliver on any additional responsibilities. There is concern that some Local Governments do not have the capacity to assume responsibility to deliver place-based, integrated service models within their existing budgets, especially the smaller remote regional local governments.

It will be important that detailed analysis is undertaken to determine which services should be delivered on a regional or district basis, and resource requirements identified accordingly.

For this model to be successful it will also require that key Government agencies have consistent regional boundaries to leverage partnerships and resource sharing.

As already mentioned in this submission, with respect to regional planning, considerable work has already been undertaken by Local Governments through the Integrated Strategic Planning process, and through the work undertaken by the previous Government to create a Regional Development Strategy and to develop a hub and spoke model through the Regional Centres Development Plan. This work should form the starting point for any new Regional Development Strategic Framework.

In Conclusion

The GVROC congratulates Infrastructure WA for progressing the development of the draft State Infrastructure Strategy. While it proposes a well-structured approach to identifying opportunities and challenges with respect to the provision of infrastructure, as detailed in our submission, the GVROC would like Infrastructure WA to carefully consider our comments and feedback and continue to consult with local government on the States and the Goldfields regional infrastructure requirements into the future.

Should you wish to discuss any of the GVROC's comments and suggestions in this submission, please contact either myself or our GVROC Executive Officer, Andrew Mann via the contact details contained at the front of the submission.

Kind regards



Malcolm Cullen – GVROC Chair

15 September 2021