Youth Affairs Council of Victoria submission to the Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Strategy

Background and consultation overview

This report is the outcome of a consultation undertaken by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) on behalf of the Department of Planning and Community Development and Capire Consulting Group. The consultation sought to provide a targeted and accessible opportunity for young people from across Melbourne to be involved in the development of the new Melbourne Metropolitan Strategy.

The report draws on data collected from 75 young people through focus groups and an online survey. Thirty young people from across 12 municipalities[1] participated in focus groups that were held in Broadmeadows (n = 6); Narre Warren (n = 9); Box Hill (n = 9); and the Melbourne CBD (n = 6). In addition, 45 young people from across Melbourne shared their ideas through the online consultation. The youngest person who took part in the consultation was 13 and the oldest was 28. All young people who took part in the focus groups, and 20 randomly selected survey participants, received a double pass to the Zoo to thank them for their participation. An overview of the focus group activities can be found in the Appendix I.

Q1 & Q2. What do you think of the outcome principles and what is needed to achieve them?

> **Key finding:** *Overall, the outcome principles reflect young people's vision for Melbourne's future. YACVic recommends that the final strategy has a greater focus on cultural vitality as a distinctive characteristic of Melbourne and on safety as feature of strong communities.*

Participant's descriptions of what Melbourne meant to them were, for the most part, consistent with the vision articulated in the discussion paper through the five outcome principles. Each of the outcome principles was touched on in the focus group discussions to some degree. The most notable discrepancy between participant's ideas and those outlined in the discussion paper was the weight given to cultural vitality as a key part of Melbourne's identity and the importance of safety

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[1] Participants in the focus groups were from: City of Casey (4); Cardinia Shire (1); City of Greater Dandenong (4) City of Monash (1); City of Whitehorse (6); City of Maroondah (2); City of Boroondara (1); City of Maribyrnong (2); City of Melbourne (2); City of Stonington (1); City of Hume (4) & City of Moreland (2).

as a feature of strong communities. This remainder of this section will provide a brief overview of the focus group discussions relevant to each principle.

Principle 1: A distinctive Melbourne

Focus group participants were asked to select a picture and that encapsulated what Melbourne meant to them and describe why this was the case. The themes evident in these descriptions suggest that young people do value the distinctiveness of the Melbourne. The following are key things that make 'A distinctive Melbourne' for young people.

- **Activities, festivals and events** make Melbourne a place where people come together and there is always something to do. Participants described the city centre as a hive of activity, as a place where they could have fun with friends, meet new people and feel a part of something bigger. One participant commented *"when you go to a music festival, gig, or a big sporting event, everyone is your friend"*.

- **Cultural vitality** was seen as a key part of Melbourne's identity. Music was the most commonly discussed element of this and art (including street art), sports and dining culture were also raised. *"Melbourne is a massive music based community and I think that is really awesome... for me personally, music is a big part of my life so having so many venues all around Melbourne where people can hold concerts is really cool... it's a really big thing in making Melbourne a place where I want to live"*.

- **Diversity is accepted and celebrated**, you can be yourself and everyone is unique. Citing the Midsummer festival as an example, one participant described the way that celebrations of diversity contribute to feelings of safety for her.

- **A unique mix of built and natural environments** makes Melbourne a place where: *"you can go from being in a central hub where things are happening on the streets, to being in a nice quiet area and being on my own and being able to experience nature and wildlife".* Several participants commented that they loved having access to both the city and the beach.

Participants suggested that it was important that these qualities be retained as the city grows. They also expressed a desire to see some of the things that characterise the CBD happening in the suburbs. Examples included: more festivals events and gigs, and greater acceptance and celebration of both social and cultural diversity.

Respondents to the survey were asked to select the three best things about Melbourne from a list. Their responses also reflect the importance of Melbourne as a culturally vibrant and social city and are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Things young people value most about Melbourne

	number
Restaurants, cafes and social venues	**18**
Its unique character	**16**
Arts and culture	**12**
Festivals and events	10
The parks and gardens	9
Sporting events (e.g. AFL, Australian Open, F1 Grand Prix etc.)	9
The range of things to see and do in and around Melbourne	8
I feel safe in Melbourne	8
The architecture	7
The people	5
People from all over the world live in Melbourne	5
The public transport	5
A strong sense of community	3

Although the discussion paper does briefly touch on 'a creative and active population' as important in creating 'A distinctive Melbourne', YACVic recommends this idea is given more weight in the final strategy.

Principle 2: A globally connected and competitive city

Although this principle was not discussed directly, ideas relating to it did come up in the focus groups. Participants talked about wanting Melbourne to be a world leader in education, a place where people from all around the world want to visit and a place where young people have access to jobs in a broad range of industries.

Someone in each focus group made reference to Melbourne as the most liveable city in the world and expressed notable pride in this.

Principle 3: Social and economic participation

Affordability and access to employment opportunities came up repeatedly in the focus groups as something that was important to participants. The idea of 'two Melbourne's' was reflected in participants views that social and economic opportunities should be available to everyone no matter where they live. Access to education featured heavily in these discussions, with participants expressing frustration at the financial pressure they would put themselves under in order to study where they wanted to.

Principle 4: Strong communities

Ideas relating to Principle 4 featured heavily in the focus group discussions. Again, there were many consistencies between focus group discussions and the ideas in the discussion paper, with the notable exception of a strong focus on safety as a feature of strong communities. There was a sense that considerable work is necessary to achieve Outcome Principle 4. The below provides some insight into these discussions.

- **Safety** was a key feature of all the focus group discussions, with many participants reporting feeling unsafe in their local communities, particularly at night. Poor lighting, anti-social behaviour and unreliable or infrequent public transport were all things that contributed to participants feeling less safe in the suburbs than they felt when they were in the CBD. At times these fears limited social opportunities for participants and made them reliant on parents to drive them around rather than walking or taking public transport.

- **Housing affordability** was noted as a challenge by both focus group participants and survey respondents. There was an overwhelming sense from focus group participants that owning their own home was not a realistic goal for the future and even finding an affordable, stable place to rent was cited as a challenge. Participants expressed frustration at this: *"I don't think it*

will be that easy for us if we want to buy a house, it seems like it would be too difficult; I feel annoyed about that, I want my own house and I want to grow veggies and have a dog and stuff". Another participant commented: *"we are not using houses for what they are for, which is for living... just using them for investment and to make money".*

- **Celebration of diversity** was something that participants reported valuing about Melbourne, however many felt that there was still room for improvement with relation to acceptance of cultural and social diversity, particularly in the suburbs.

Discussions about addressing these issues were focused largely on access to the services. Participants felt that if people in their communities had access to the services they needed they would be less likely to be *"on the streets"* and that this would in turn make their communities safer. Ideas about law enforcement were notably absent from these discussions. Participants instead focused on better lighting, wider streets, and more frequent and reliable public transport as strategies to improve safety in their suburbs. They also discussed community events and festivals as important for community building and increasing acceptance of cultural and social diversity across all parts of Melbourne.

> *"Melbourne should be a place where you don't have to try hard to find happiness or to fit in... everyone should have a fair chance to be healthy and happy".*

Principle 5: Environmental resilience

Participants were eager to see green spaces retained and ideas about sustainable, clean living front and centre as Melbourne grows. This will be discussed in more depth in response to discussion question 8. Q3. What are the key ingredients for success in the achieving the vision of an expanded city centre?

N/A

Q4. What do you think of the idea of identifying and reinforcing employment and innovation clusters across Melbourne?

Key finding: Young people would like to see more economic opportunities available outside of the inner city but it is important that these are accompanied by social opportunities, green spaces and investment in transport infrastructure.

As noted above, young people who took part in the focus groups spoke about place based discrepancies in access to opportunity. Employment and education were key features of these discussions, with participants noting greater access to both in inner city areas. A couple of participants also noted dissatisfaction at the congestion on roads and transport that results from the centralising of opportunities.

Employment and innovation clusters outside of the CBD have the potential to be effective in addressing this. Thinking about how these centres may work in practice however, requires acknowledgement that young people want more than employment opportunities from the places that they live. Encouraging a diverse range of young people to live and work in outer suburbs in the longer term will require investment in social opportunities, green spaces and transport infrastructure alongside economic investment. This is discussed in more depth in discussion questions 6 and 7.

Q5. What is needed to support growth and development in regional cities?

N/A

Q6. What do you think of the idea of a '20 minute city'?

Key Finding: Young people like the idea of 'living locally' and reducing car dependence, however their experiences suggest that there is a long way to go to achieve a '20 minute city' for all Melbournians.

Young people who took part in the focus groups were enthusiastic about the idea of 'living locally'. Despite this, the majority of participants felt that significant changes

were necessary in order to achieve it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was more marked the further from the CBD participants lived. Upon hearing the idea, one participant in the Narre Warren focus group commented under her breath, *"impossible".*

To get focus group participants thinking about the concept, and provide a basis for discussion, they were asked to list the key things that they do in their lives and organise them on a worksheet based on whether they could get there in 20 minutes and by what mode of transport (e.g. walk, public transport, driving etc.). Survey respondents undertook a similar activity by ticking boxes.

The results of this activity varied amongst the focus groups – the further away from the CBD participants lived, the heavier their reliance on car travel and the more things were out of reach within the 20 minute timeframe. Participants who lived closer to the CBD commented that while they had access to most things within 20 minutes now, they expected to have to give this up in order to buy a house in an area that they could afford.

Transport repeatedly came up as an issue throughout the focus groups and was a key factor in shaping participant's access to employment, education and recreational activities. Participants commented that even though the distances between the things they wanted and needed to do were generally not far, without a car they were often difficult – if not impossible – to navigate. They suggested that public transport should focus on getting people around their local area, not just in and out of the CBD. They complained about the frequency and reliability of services and safety was also an issue for some (e.g. long waits at night, not feeling safe on transport). This was particularly frustrating for participants whose public transport options were further limited by not all transport options/routes being wheelchair accessible.

Some participants used a bike to get around and commented that they would like to see more infrastructure dedicated to making riding safer.

As can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3 below, survey respondents also cited transport as the key challenge and the main priority in planning for the future of Melbourne.

Table 2. Key challenges facing Melbourne

	number
Public transport	**23**
Cost of living	**15**
Availability of affordable housing	**14**
Traffic	12
Hospital waiting lists	12
Protecting 'green' spaces (e.g. parks, bushland, backyards)	11
Population growth	8
Climate change	7
Loss of community	6
Crime	3
Unemployment	3
Shortage of childcare	2
Job security	0

Table 3. Main priorities in planning for the future of Melbourne

	number
Providing a transport system that meets the needs of a growing city	24
Providing a range of affordable housing options in different parts of the city	16
Introducing a range of new housing options in existing suburbs	13
Making the city more environmentally sustainable	13
Maintaining or extending green areas in and around the city for leisure, farming and native habitats	12
Making jobs and services accessible to people in outer areas of Melbourne	12
Creating a city where people can meet most of their needs within 20 minutes travel from their home	10
Creating a city that attracts global investment and tourism	7
Providing attractive lifestyle and employment opportunities in regional Victorian cities and towns	5
Creating attractive and vibrant mixed-use neighbourhoods in suburban areas (e.g. neighbourhoods that have a mix of different types of houses, units and apartment blocks)	3

Responses to the '20 minute city' activity from the survey respondents, displayed in Table 4 below, showed heavy car dependence and a number of activities currently out of reach within 20 minutes.

Table 4. Reported distance travelled to participate in activities for survey respondents

	within 20 mins walk	within 20 mins by PT/bike/skate	within 20 mins by car	can't get there in 20 mins	I don't do that
Hanging out with friends	18*	24	36	21	0
Study	21	18	15	36	9
Work	9	15	18	42	15
Participating in sporting activity	18	12	27	18	24
Hobby (art, music etc.)	28	13	16	25	19
Going to the movies	24	33	36	6	0
Shopping	24	19	16	41	0
Going to a sporting event	6	9	18	45	21
Going to a gig/concert	3	6	18	48	24
Use a health or well-being service (e.g. doctor, counselor, chiropractor, etc.)	33	18	36	12	0

*numbers are reported as percentages

Access to transport is a big issue for young people, and one that has implications beyond mere convenience. Being dependant on others to get around limits access to social and economic opportunities, and this was cited as a major frustration by participants.

Q7. How can established suburbs accommodate the needs of changing populations and maintain what people value about their area?

> *Key finding: Increasing economic and social opportunities in the suburbs, coupled with investment in transport infrastructure, has the potential to result in a more diverse range of young people opting for lifestyles outside inner Melbourne in the longer term.*

As noted above, focus group participants were enthusiastic about the idea of 'living locally' and receptive to ideas about investment in economic opportunity outside the CBD.

> *"when I think of Melbourne, it's not just the city centre, because I don't really spend much time there, It's more about the suburbs and both of them together how they meld together... for me it's about the suburbs... it's just homely and it's like a bit of a sense of community pride there".*

In order to explore ideas for unlocking the potential of the existing suburbs, both focus group participants and survey respondents were asked to reflect on the things that they valued about their local areas and the things that they didn't like or wanted to see improved.

What do young people value about the suburbs where they live?

- **Events, activities and services** were important in creating places where participants wanted to live. Participants talked about a sense of community being fostered through festivals and other cultural events that encouraged community members to come together. They liked living close to family and friends and also valued living in communities that were lively, multicultural, and had lots to do. This included things like shopping centres and recreation and aquatic centres. It also included youth services, libraries, health centres and a range of educational opportunities.

- **Cleanliness and proximity to nature** were also highly valued as was clean air, clean streets and access to walking tracks, parks and bike paths. participants who lived close to the urban fringe commented on the importance of space and of having peace and quiet.

- **Affordability** was cited as an important feature of the areas where they lived by participants from some outer suburbs and also participants from Footscray. One participant from Casey commented that *"you don't need to spend much to live in the greatest place in the world".*

Survey respondents were asked an open ended question about what they liked the most about the suburbs where they lived. The free-text responses were grouped thematically and the results can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Things young people value about the suburb where they live

	number
services and amenities	20
nature	17
community	14
living local	11
transport	9
neighbourhood character	7
education	4
quiet	4
safe	4
clean	2
culture	1
other	1

Affordability was not mentioned by survey participants, but otherwise responses reflected the discussions from the focus groups. Responses relating to services and amenities described things such as sports and leisure facilities, shopping centres and community services.

What areas for improvement do young people identify?

Overall, focus groups participants identified more things that they liked about their suburbs than things they thought needed to change. Despite this, participants did identify things they would like to see improved and in many cases participants described being motivated to leave the area based on these factors.

- **Access to transport** – see Q6.

- **Safety** – see Q1 & Q2.

- **Access to education and employment opportunities** was a common reason cited for wanting to move somewhere else. Participants expressed some frustration that their choice of high school was generally determined purely based on where they lived. They suggested that they would like to have more choice and also felt that more money should be spent on keeping

facilities up-to-date, particularly in public schools. With regard to tertiary education participants suggested that both variety and quality were higher closer to the CBD.

- **Culture, character and stereotypes** related to particular places were another key thing that participants reported as making them feel less inclined to remain in their current suburb on a long-term basis. Although participants described Melbourne as a place where you could 'be yourself', many felt that this was less true in the outer suburbs. They described feeling that the suburbs were more homogenous and less accepting of diversity resulting in increased pressure to conform to social ideals and, in some cases, reduced feelings of safety. Class was also cited as an issue in that participants felt they were judged by where they lived, the school they went to and the things that they owned.

Participants also talked about neighbourhood character as something they valued, but with quite mixed ideas about what this should look like. Some participants noted the suburban character as something they valued, but still acknowledged and even encouraged the need to provide different types of housing in suburban areas. Others were resistant to change and commented that they *"wish[ed] all of the building would stop".*

Survey respondents were asked an open ended question about what they would like to change about the suburbs where they lived.   The free-text responses were grouped thematically and the results can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Things young people would like to see improved in the suburb where they live

	number
transport	28
services and amenities	10
safety	9
neighbourhood character	8
affordability	7
activities	5
nature	5
cleanliness	5

community	4
education and employment	2
governance	2
other	9

Again, transport was the main issue for survey respondents. Suggestions included improvements to public transport, roads and bike infrastructure.

Focus group participants acknowledged some of the improvements to their suburbs that were already happening, but noted that addressing their areas of concern, particularly around the culture of places, would be a challenge.

> *"They try to do things... you can change all of the buildings but to change the culture, to change people's attitudes is a lot more difficult."*

Despite this, the value that participants attached to their suburbs was encouraging and indicated that investment in the existing suburbs may result in a more diverse range of young people opting for lifestyles outside inner Melbourne in the longer term. One participant described the way that moving closer to the city in order to access economic and social opportunity meant leaving his community and *"create[ing] my own community in the city"* he said that while this had been a good experience he *"would like people not to have to move so far inwards, away from family and friends"* in order to access opportunities.

Q8. How do we ensure a healthy and sustainable environment for future generations?

> ***Key finding:*** *Young people are acutely aware of environmental challenges. Continued commitment to existing behaviour change programs and innovative approaches to new ones are a helpful way of getting everyone on board to preserve Melbourne's environment.*

Young people in each of the focus groups were asked to brainstorm ideas around the following statements:

- Things I can do to help the environment that are easy... (e.g. I do this all the time without even thinking about it)

- Things I can do to help the environment that take more effort... (e.g. I know that this is something I can do but I don't always do it)

- Things I want government, business and corporations to do to help the environment... (e.g. things that are outside my control but that I would like to see happen)

This brainstorm generated approximately 150 discrete suggestions from which the following themes emerged.

Easy ways help the environment included: recycling; disposing of litter appropriately; conserving resources by turning off lights and appliances; and using lower impact forms of transport. Suggestions also acknowledged the role of technology in making environmental conscious behaviour easier (e.g. energy saving light bulbs and water saving shower heads).

Interestingly, using lower impact forms of transport and conserving resources by turning off lights and appliances were identified as 'easy' by some participants but as taking more effort by others. This suggests that while campaigns to promote environmental consciousness have had some success, the behaviours they promote are not yet second nature to all.

In addition to transport and conserving resources, things that participants thought they could do to help the environment that took more effort included: ethical consumption (e.g. buying second hand goods, buying from environmentally conscious companies); home improvements (e.g. solar panels, buying low emission appliances); and getting involved (e.g. joining a local environmental group, planting trees).

Things that participants wanted to see government and corporations doing to help the environment included: greater investment in, and commitment to, using renewable energy sources; the protection of natural resources and green spaces around Melbourne; funding for innovative programs and initiatives; and running promotion and awareness raising campaigns.

In general discussion following this activity, some participants expressed frustration at the pressure to address problems imposed on them as a result of the environmental failures of the past. They also suggested that it is hard for people to fully understand the impact of things that happen so slowly and that education campaigns and other strategies should seek to address this.

Q9. What do you think about the possible ways of funding infrastructure?

N/A

Q10. How can all levels of government, business and community work together to create the city you want?

> ***Key finding:*** *Young people are enthusiastic about shaping the future of their communities and there are opportunities for government to tap into existing mechanisms to involve young people in the implementation of the final strategy.*

At the end of each focus group, and in the survey, participants were asked if and how they would want to be involved in the implementation of the final strategy. They were also asked more generally about ideas to involve young people in planning processes. Both focus group participants and survey respondents overwhelmingly agreed that young people should be involved in planning for and shaping the future of places where they live. Determining how this should occur was more challenging but some ideas were generated.

- **Interesting and accessible consultation** was seen as a good way to address the challenges of engaging young people. The idea of 'going to them' – both physically and through social media – was a common theme. Participants also suggested longer term participation through getting young people involved in more volunteer opportunities and in committees or groups aimed at making decisions in these areas.

- **Being informed as well as consulted** was cited as important: *"young people should be educated about the issues that are going on and why they should be involved – it can be quite daunting but if we understand the issues and what we can do about them then we are more likely to want to get involved".* Working with schools and making links between the curriculum and community issues was a good way for this to occur.

- **Valuing young people's contributions** was seen as pivotally important in ensuring that young people would actually want to get involved: *"Listen to us, I feel like these days we are written off really quickly because of the stereotypes attached to us. More young people would want to get involved in their communities if they felt that they would be listened to."*

Young people who took part in this consultation were incredibly enthusiastic about being involved in shaping the future of their communities. Many participants are involved in activities aimed at engaging young people with these issues through their local government youth services. YACVic recommends that governance arrangements relating to metropolitan planning create strong links between local level community engagement and state level decision making. In addition, YACVic recommends that young people's views are represented in this space through tapping into the existing civic engagement work of local government youth services.

Appendix I. Focus group outline

PLAN MELBOURNE – YOUTH FRIENDLY CONVERSATION TOOLKIT

INTRO (10 MINS)

Explain what the Melbourne Metropolitan plan is (make sure clear about distinction between Melbourne City and the Melbourne Metropolitan area – use a big map to demonstrate)

- Helps us get from where we are to where we want to go
- Use example of City of Melbourne 1984 – now

Explain the process of consultation that is happening around Plan Melbourne at the moment.

Talk about why it is important to have young people involved.

Give an overview of the workshop.

PART 1/ICEBREAKER (20 MINS)

To start off with I want to get you to think about what living in Melbourne means to you. What are the main things that make it great? What things are important to consider when we think about what Melbourne will be like in the future?

ACTIVITY:

- Looking at the pictures and ideas in the centre, take a picture card that symbolises Melbourne for you and an idea card that describes what you would like Melbourne to be like in the future (don't forget we are talking about Metro Melbourne not CoM!).
- Go around the circle and get people to say their name, where they are from and talk about why they chose their picture and their idea.

PART 2 CONT. (15 MINS)

By the time someone born today turns 18, there will be almost 1 million extra people living in Melbourne. Ever been to a sell out match at the MCG? Imagine 10 times that number of people. All of those people will need a place to live, roads to drive on, trains, services, etc.

To make sure that the city still works – even with all of the extra people – we have to think of new ideas to help us achieve the things that right now maybe we take for granted.

Making this work is going to mean building on the stuff that we already have. I want you now to think about your local area (might be best to get participants into groups based on LGA).

ACTIVITY:

- Okay, so you each have two pieces of butchers paper. I want you to imagine that I am new to Melbourne – I have come to live here from overseas. You are trying to convince me that I should come and live in your suburb.

- On one of the pieces of butchers paper I want you to write down all the things you can think of that make your town/suburb great (reasons why I would want to live there).

- On the other piece I want you to think about all of the things that you don't like or would want to change about your suburbs (so things that might put me off wanting to live there).

- Get each group to share two things from each page <quickly!>

PART 2 CONT. (20 MINS)

One of the main ideas that the planners are excited about is trying to improve people's lives by helping them 'live locally' and the idea of a '20 minute city' – I'll explain what that means in a minute but first:

ACTIVITY:

- Give participants a bunch of labels and get them to write on each label something that they do in their life (including work, study, free time – maybe have some pre-prepared)

- So coming back to a 20 minute city. Basically what that means it that they want to create a city that people can do most of the things they want to do within 20 minutes of where they live. They think that people's quality of life will be better if they spend less time travelling.

- Give participants Handout 1 and ask them to stick their activities in the appropriate part of the circle. (Make sure to include suburb where they live and access to a car on hand out).

- Looking at your page – how realistic do you think the idea of a '20 minute city' is for you?

- What would need to change to get more things in to your circle?

- What do you think of the idea of a 20 minute city?

PART 2 CONT. (15 MINS)

I want to talk a bit now about the environment. Guess how much waste each person in Victoria creates every year? Is it a) their own body weight; b) the weight of an average sized elephant; c) the weight of 17 phone books; or d) the weight of a large truck? (Answer is elephant)

More people will likely equal more waste, unless we think of ways to better manage the environment as Melbourne grows.

ACTIVITY:

- So we have three stations with three different questions 'Things I can do to help the environment that are easy'; 'Things I can do to help the environment that take more effort' and; 'Things I want the government to do to help the environment'.

- I want you to get in to 3 groups and each take one of these questions – each group will spend 3 minutes at each station and I want you to try come up with as many ideas as you can!

PART 3 (10 MINS)

So making a plan is in some ways the easy part. Actually making the plan happen is way tougher.

> DISCUSSION:
>
> - What ideas do you have about how Government can better involve young people in helping make the plan happen? (maybe get them to talk to the person next to them first and then do group discussion).