

COVID Recovery Collective – Joint statement from:

Committee for Geelong

Geelong Chamber of Commerce

Geelong Manufacturing Council

G21 - Geelong Region Alliance

Tourism Greater Geelong & the Bellarine

City of Greater Geelong

Six local organisations representing the Geelong-region community have joined forces to agree on a list of projects to support the region through economic and social recovery.

The Chairs and CEOs of the Committee for Geelong, G21 – Geelong Region Alliance, Geelong Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Greater Geelong & the Bellarine and the Geelong Manufacturing Council and the Mayor and CEO of the City of Greater Geelong have aligned their focus and advocacy to the State and Federal governments, to ensure a joint approach on projects that address the challenges our region faces during COVID-19 recovery. These projects are:

- **Expediting the City Deal and all of its projects** – the Geelong and Great Ocean Road City Deal is an agreed pathway for three levels of government to invest in the region’s recovery. These projects are already funded and approved, with many of them having developed project plans. Expediting the funding agreements and enacting these projects immediately can provide the region with increased tourism product plus significant short, medium and long-term employment growth. Importantly local training and job opportunities will be embedded in contracts under the City Deal.
- **Duplication of the rail line between South Geelong and Waurin Ponds** - this is an approved project of the Victorian and Federal Governments with funding allocated in the 2023/24 Federal Budget. Victorian and Federal Governments should immediately bring funding forward to commence this \$700 million project to create jobs in the construction phases for several years. Importantly it will create better access to the region via rail and assist further private development and economic growth. Faster and more reliable train services between Geelong and Melbourne is also a key driver for future prosperity in the region.
- **Investment and support for a region wide integrated transport plan** - including freight and passenger connections. As our region is continuing to rapidly grow, it is vital that transport connectivity is improved across the region including public transport, roads, connections to Geelong Port and to Avalon. Efficient and suitable connections to Geelong Port are required to ensure that planned future growth and economic development occurs. Planning for transport connections to Geelong’s new growth areas at Lovely Banks and Batesford South and the Barwon Heads Road duplication must also be a focus.
- **Prosperity through health & wellbeing** - The proposed Northern ARC Health & Wellbeing Hub at Norlane delivers state-of-the-art aquatic and fitness facilities along with health and community facilities, with a focus on preventative health and wellbeing complementing Barwon Health North that is situated on the same site. It would provide long overdue health infrastructure to a growing area and would generate \$111 million in preventative health benefits to the community over 10 years. The Vital Communities program includes initiatives to improve the prosperity of communities in Corio, Norlane and Whittington. The program aims to increase the liveability of these suburbs by improving five areas of activity education, employment, housing, neighbourhood liveability and health and wellbeing.
- **Stimulus for the visitor economy** - with a need to foster creativity and a new way of thinking in the visitor economy, a product innovation fund could be established to focus on supporting new or changed visitor experience products. Government incentives could be linked with private investment opportunities through an incubator / accelerator ecosystem and regional tourism organisation priority projects. This could be a state-wide initiative to foster innovation and create a funnel of new opportunity across the state.

- **A focus on local procurement** – If included in the supply chain, local industry will benefit from significant government and private investment. Funding contracts need strong local content provisions which should target and support regional suppliers and where relevant mandated enforceable local (Australian) procurement provision.
- **A focus on social procurement** - The region, through the GROW initiative, has thrown its support behind the notion of inclusive economic growth. As a whole, the region recognises that there are areas and suburbs experiencing high levels of disadvantage and that through socially procured employment, opportunities can be created for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. All government funding contracts should include strong, measurable provisions for GROW social procurement.
- **Small to medium suppliers (SMEs) in the supply chain** – SMEs do not have the balance sheet and cash flow strength to carry excessive debtors. Timely payments of supply contracts make a significant difference to SMEs. Victorian and Federal governments must ensure that government departments, government agencies, statutory authorities, local governments and private enterprises associated with government-funded projects adhere to strict payment guidelines ensuring all SMES are paid no later than 30 days.
- **Stimulus for local manufacturing** - With much discussion on the loss of sovereign capability, the Federal Government can provide programs to support the development of alternative manufacturing through R&D, other rapid write off incentives for new investment, enforceable mandated local content provisions and supportive measures for innovative manufacturing and start-up business.
- **Port of Geelong** –requires funding to increase freight efficiency, support general port business needs and deliver on the actions defined within the Port Development Strategy. With the announcement of the Spirit of Tasmania set to berth in Geelong from 2022, planning and infrastructure to support this significant project also requires immediate focus.
- **Avalon Airport** - has significant demand for improved transport connections to Melbourne, Geelong and regional Victoria. Avalon Airport has produced a plan for a remote terminal connected into a faster rail station making it more accessible to passengers which will increase demand for airline services and in turn lead to more airlines using the airport.
- **Support for Deakin University** – hit hard financially from COVID-19 and now forecasting the loss of 400 jobs, the Deakin community needs support from governments including ‘safe passage’ quarantine pathways for Geelong’s valued international students. Flexibility and funding will be needed to support increased numbers of school leavers and mature age students to study particularly in areas of skills shortage. Industry policy which builds higher R&D activities by further supporting industry and university collaboration is urgently required.