

## Submission to the Australian Government Inquiry into a New Regional Development Funding Program

**Prepared for:** The Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional  
Development & Local Government

**Prepared by:** The Committee for Geelong, July 2008

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### Purpose:

- Submission to the House Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
- The inquiry's terms of reference call for comments on:
  1. future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects;
  2. ways to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers;
  3. the former government's practices and grants outlined in the Australian National Audit Office report on Regional Partnerships with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs; and
  4. the former government's practices and grants in the Regional Partnerships Program after the audit period of 2003-2006 with the aim of providing advice on future funding of regional programs.
- This submission provides comments from a broader Geelong perspective and deals with issues and impacts relating to future infrastructure projects that will help ensure the continued growth and prosperity of our region.
- We have addressed terms 1 and 2 directly.



## **Introduction to the Committee for Geelong**

The Committee for Geelong was established in July 2001 to serve as a catalyst to materially improve the quality of life for the citizens of Geelong. It acts by researching, validating and building community support for long-term projects that will fulfil this aim.

The Committee has over 120 active members representing the peak business, community and government representatives of our region.

The Committee for Geelong has long recognised that the success of Geelong and the region's growth is very much dependent upon our relationship with Melbourne. Critical to that is high-calibre infrastructure that will enable the Geelong region to continue evolving and growing sustainably ... and in a way that leverages from strategic links with Melbourne, whilst underpinning Geelong's capability as a responsive major service provider to the regions.

### ***1) future funding of regional programs in order to invest in genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects:***

Geelong is the closest **Second City** to a capital centre in Australia. Both the state and federal governments have acknowledged that it is critical for cities such as Melbourne and Geelong to be closely integrated in terms of transport and other key infrastructure:

In order to do this, it is imperative that cities like Geelong seek to develop and deliver more coordinated and sophisticated infrastructure solutions.

Second Cities encounter a range of unique opportunities and dilemmas: big enough to compete strategically for investment alongside capital cities, yet still small enough to face the challenges inherent to pure regional centres, such as skill shortages, medical workforce shortages and infrastructure gaps.

On the one hand - as a rapidly advancing Second City - Geelong's infrastructure needs are more complex and diverse than other regional centres. On the other hand, Geelong must 'play to its strengths' and rationalise its approach to attracting investment and planning projects as compared to a capital centre scenario - for example, concentrating on projects that strengthen and grow specific industries (such as seeking assistance for projects that bolster our burgeoning biotechnology precincts), advancing transport and logistics projects, and streamlining access for tourism.



The Committee for Geelong advocates absolutely any future funding program that supports priority-setting at the local level. However, we would prefer to see this advanced at least one step further – in particular for larger centres. We urge the government to seek out ways to support the unique and increasingly complex infrastructure needs of Second Cities and/ or major service centres.

A funding framework that supports a ‘whole of city’ approach to priority-setting will be critical in a future where large Second Cities (such as Geelong) continue developing in a sustainable way. That is the future we envision. This approach would see local government, statutory authorities, business and community organisations working together to align their priorities in a ‘bigger picture’ plan for their city/ region.

## ***2) ways to minimise administrative costs and duplication for taxpayers;***

The Committee has identified and supports a range of characteristics and specific activities that will assist in reducing taxpayer cost burdens. These are:

- More cooperative Federalism with seamless communication and ‘service delivery’ between state and federal governments
- A cross-portfolio approach to more complex regional projects that can demonstrate strong community benefit
- A more integrated approach to funding projects, including a ‘whole of city approach’ for Second Cities and/ or larger regional centres
- Provision of a funding framework that enables regions to take a ‘long-term’ view and plan strategically, while still facilitating the advancement of smaller projects that deliver more immediate and tangible community benefits
- Making project validation and funding decisions at a local level via a transparent, non-aligned model of the local consultation process through an independent board or committee of government.

## **CONCLUSION**

This inquiry comes at a unique time in Australia’s history when we have the opportunity to build a cohesive model that can deliver Federalism in its purest sense. For the government to make its best attempt to minimise costs and duplication, it



must seek to redress the previous funding and policy impasses between state and federal governments.

The Committee for Geelong would be pleased to see an adjustment to the traditional infrastructure funding models embodied in the development of a new approach that specifically takes into account infrastructure needs and solutions for larger centres – in particular, for Second Cities.

We also urge the government to consider models of funding that promote projects that integrate with the 'broader vision' of Second Cities and larger centres. This will be essential if we are to continue to support the expansion of investment, development of industry, and population dispersal, beyond the capital cities.

Local priority-setting is critical, but we need to look beyond the idea of 'capacity building' in regional centres. It is now time for cohesive delivery of infrastructure projects. The Committee for Geelong advocates project decision-making being guided by those with a genuine stake in the outcomes of any project funding - the local community.

As the business and community leaders of Victoria's Second City, it is incumbent on us to have a clear and strategic vision on how to grow and prosper. Effective links between Geelong and Melbourne are central to our vision.

Congratulations on initiating this inquiry and offering the community the opportunity to be part of this important process. The Committee for Geelong very much looks forward to participating in this process further and learning of the inquiry's conclusions.

Yours faithfully

**Dr Jim Cousins, AO**  
Chairman

28 July 2008