

12.6 Quarterly Advocacy Update - December 2024

Directorate	People, Partnerships and Performance
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Attachment(s)	Nil

Purpose

To note the major advocacy-related developments from September to November 2024 and to relaunch a refreshed Transforming Brimbank campaign.

Officer Recommendations**That Council:**

- a. **Notes the major developments over the past three months that are related to our advocacy priorities.**
- b. **Endorses the relaunch of our refreshed Transforming Brimbank campaign, with a focus on the development of the Sunshine Precinct and the construction of the Melbourne Airport Rail (MAR).**

Background**Brimbank's Advocacy Priorities**

Council's advocacy priorities are aligned to the Council Plan Strategic Directions and are detailed in the Brimbank Advocacy Plan 2023-25. Our priorities are selected using a rigorous process that identifies topics with strong community support as well as those that provide benefits that span across Brimbank and beyond our boundaries and have ongoing lasting effects well into the future.

These priorities are outlined below along with their level of importance.

- Transforming Brimbank – Gold
- Mental Health – Gold
- Road Infrastructure – Silver
- Climate Emergency – Silver
- Addressing Unemployment – Bronze
- Housing and Homelessness – Bronze
- Melbourne Airport Third Runway - Maintain Influence
- Gambling Harm - Maintain Influence
- Major Parks - Maintain Influence
- Libraries - Maintain Influence
- Government Burden on Council - Maintain Influence

Major advocacy developments and highlights are reported to Council each quarter.

Transforming Brimbank Community Campaign

Located in the middle of Melbourne's fast-growing western suburbs, Brimbank is home to nearly 200,000 residents and is a car-centric municipality facing high traffic congestion,

limited transport options, a high unemployment rate, diverse housing needs, and a less mature development market.

At the centre of Brimbank sits the Sunshine Precinct, strategically located less than 15 km west of the CBD and less than 15 km south of Melbourne Airport. The Precinct is also a transport hub with ample land available for development. It is therefore well placed to be the centre of Melbourne's booming west and a key economic hub, with the capacity for an additional 29,000 jobs and housing for 43,000 new residents by 2051. The Sunshine Precinct is the only location in Melbourne that the Victorian Government has declared a Metropolitan Activity Centre, a National Employment and Innovation Centre, a Priority Precinct and a Transport Super Hub. It has also been added to Infrastructure Australia's list of priority projects.

To realise Sunshine's full potential and break the cycle of generational disadvantage in Melbourne's west, Council launched the 'Transforming Brimbank' advocacy campaign in 2021, focused on major local infrastructure investments promoting transport connectivity and stimulating significant economic growth, particularly around the Sunshine Precinct. As part of this campaign, we produced the Sunshine Priority Precinct Vision 2050 followed by the 'Let's Build It Better' brochure, positioning Sunshine as a key Priority Precinct with significant opportunities for transport connections, jobs, economic development and housing.

In response, the Victorian Government released the Sunshine Precinct Opportunity Statement in November 2021, outlining its vision and framework for transformational outcomes in the area. This was followed by several government announcements ahead of the 2022 Victorian State election which committed to constructing a new train station at Keilor East, \$80 million towards the rebuild of Albion Station and the release of the Sunshine Station Masterplan coupled with a \$143m commitment towards implementing the first stage of this Masterplan. Despite these announcements, delays have since emerged.

In May 2023, the Australian Government conducted a review of the nation's 'Infrastructure Investment Program', casting doubts on the MAR project and related infrastructure projects committed for Melbourne's west, including the implementation of the Sunshine Station Masterplan, the Albion Station rebuild and the new Keilor East station. After strong advocacy efforts from Brimbank, the Australian Government reconfirmed its \$5 billion commitment to MAR in November 2023. However, due to a longstanding disagreement between the Melbourne Airport operator and the Victorian Government over the positioning of the station at the airport (underground vs above-ground), the Australian Government appointed an independent mediator in January 2024 in an attempt to break the deadlock. Following the mediation process in June 2024, it was recommended that the airport station be built above-ground. Despite Melbourne Airport's consequent concession to proceed with an above-ground station, the Victorian Government has insisted on a 4-year delay to the MAR project. A further complicating issue is the Australian Government's approval in August 2024 of Melbourne Airport's Major Development Plan for a third runway. Set to become operational in 2031, this additional runway will result in an increased number of airline passengers and airport staff. In the absence of an airport rail, the traffic congestion on the already busy road network in Melbourne's west will be further exacerbated.

The Australian Government's independent mediation also recommended that "*works continue at Sunshine Station to transform this into the major transport hub that it was planned to be*", and that these works can proceed on a 'no regrets' basis due to existing progress and future benefits. In September 2024, Council welcomed a joint announcement by the State and Federal Governments to invest \$63.5m to commence works to rebuild Sunshine Station in preparation for MAR. While this is a step in the right direction, no start date has been specified for the Sunshine Station Masterplan, which

includes 3 Victorian Government-owned development sites; Station Place, Sun Crescent and Southern Village, each offering diverse spaces for new businesses and affordable housing to address the current housing crisis.

New residential dwellings close to public and active transport connections can also be achieved by the development of the Albion Quarter which sits on the northern end of the Sunshine Precinct. In May 2024, the Victorian Government released the Albion Quarter Structure Plan discussion paper. This aims at transitioning the area around Albion Station from industrial-focused businesses to mixed use by supporting the next generation of jobs, housing, innovation and services. Council looks forward to continuing to work with the Victorian Government on the progression and implementation of this Structure Plan.

Matters for Consideration

Relevant Advocacy Developments

The whole-of-Council advocacy-related developments and highlights from September 2024 to the end of November 2024 are summarised below.

Melbourne Airport Third Runway - Announcement & Senate Inquiry (Maintain Influence)

For over 2 years, Brimbank has advocated strongly for the Federal Government to consider the health impacts of Melbourne Airport's proposed third runway on our residents. We have hosted and participated in various community events, provided numerous submissions to government and raised the matter on multiple occasions at the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association. We have also met with the responsible Minister the Hon Catherine King MP on several occasions.

The Minister provided conditional approval for the Major Development Plan (MDP) for the project on 13 September 2024. We will continue to advocate to Melbourne Airport and the Federal Government about the importance of community engagement with the Brimbank community and improvements to airport planning.

Following the government's decision to approve the MDP, a Senate Inquiry into the *Impact and Mitigation of Aircraft Noise* was held on 20 September 2024. Brimbank welcomed this Inquiry as well as the topics that were discussed, particularly our concerns with Melbourne Airport's third runway that were raised by Senator Steph Hodgins-May.

Development of the Sunshine Precinct (Gold)

On 19 September 2024, the State and Federal Governments jointly announced a \$63.5 million investment to start works to rebuild Sunshine Station. This will include an additional platform, track and bridge works, as well as signalling improvements.

The works will create the capacity for:

- A rail connection to Melbourne Airport, enabling 6 trains per hour to the airport.
- More frequent and reliable services passing through Sunshine.
- Additional services from Wyndham Vale.
- Future electrified trains to run from Melton.

Council issued a media release and a social media post to welcome this announcement, particularly as it forms part of our gold level Transforming Brimbank advocacy priority.

The announcement was followed by a visit to Brimbank on 23 October by the Hon Colin Brooks MP, Victorian Minister for Precincts. This was an opportunity for Council Officers to discuss our vision for the Sunshine Precinct with the Minister as well as next steps.

Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Services (Maintain Influence)

On 19 September 2024, Brimbank Council Officers appeared before the *Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Services* to provide evidence on how current government legislative requirements and regulations are fast becoming a burden on Local Government. Brimbank's evidence included our challenges to invest in community infrastructure and deliver necessary community services while dealing with the restrictions of rate-capping and the cost-shifting of responsibilities from the Victorian Government to Local Government. Examples of cost-shifting in Brimbank include:

- School crossing supervisors
- Changes in funding to libraries
- Changes in funding to maternal and child health programs
- Policy changes for kindergartens
- Changes to State policy on waste that are driving increased expenditure
- Responsibility for social infrastructure
- Expenses related to flammable cladding
- Public maintenance of works for which the State is responsible, such as arterial roads.

Brimbank used the opportunity of this Inquiry to advocate for:

- A review of the current rate-capping system
- Increase government grant funding as well as an increase in the quantum of the Federal Government's Financial Assistance Grants
- Cost-shifting to be analysed and consideration given for appropriate levels of funding.

Road Safety Works (Silver)

On 29 October 2024, State Minister for Roads the Hon Melissa Horne MP announced the beginning of works funded through the \$210 million *Safer Local Roads and Streets Program* that was committed last year. This will include \$616,000 for the installation of speed humps along Hall Street, Hilma Street and Mailey Street in Sunshine West. The speed humps will be spaced in regular intervals to encourage slower speeds, increasing pedestrian safety and reducing the likelihood of crashes.

Transforming Brimbank Community Campaign

Launched in April 2021, Council's Transforming Brimbank campaign preceded the State Government committing to a number of significant projects ahead of the 2022 Victorian State Election. However, the progression of these projects has been much slower than anticipated, coupled with the construction of the MAR being delayed until 2033. A new Council term creates an opportunity to refresh and resume the Transforming Brimbank campaign, with the aim of progressing the projects that have been promised for the residents of Brimbank and Melbourne's west.

Council's new campaign will be focusing on the development of the Sunshine Precinct as the first step of the MAR project. We will also be calling on the State Government to reconsider the 4-year delay to the rail's construction. With the third runway at Melbourne Airport set to be operational by 2031, the increased number of airline passengers and

airport staff will further congest the already busy Tullamarine Freeway. It is therefore imperative that the rail be completed before the runway.

Investment in both the Sunshine Precinct and MAR is poised to unlock one of Melbourne's largest urban renewal projects and up to \$8 billion in private economic development opportunities, attracting new residents, businesses, creative industries and tourists to Melbourne's west.

Our Campaign

Council's campaign will call for the fulfilment of government commitments to:

- Immediately commence works on the Sunshine Station Masterplan (State and Federal)
- Revise the timeline of the MAR project so that the rail is completed ahead of Melbourne Airport's third runway becoming operational in 2031 (State and Federal)
- Proceed to rebuilding Albion Station (State) and ensuring that the Albion Quarter Structure Plan aligns with the vision of our community
- Construct the new train station at Keilor East (State)
- Provide clear timelines for the above-mentioned projects.

In addition, Council calls on the State Government to introduce a new direct bus service from Sunshine Station to Melbourne Airport, thereby providing airport staff and airline passengers with this much needed connection from a major transport hub in Melbourne's west to one of the State's largest single-site employers.

Melbourne's west has not received the level of infrastructure funding that is required to sustain one of the nation's fastest growing populations. Such infrastructure is also critical for the investment to accommodate the strong need for new housing development in the region. Our campaign is necessary to ensure that Melbourne's west is given the same level of priority as Melbourne's east that will benefit from mega projects such as the Suburban Rail Loop, set to service populations that are already well connected by public transport, despite costing significantly more and requiring a much longer timeline to build compared with the Melbourne Airport Rail project.

Community Engagement

This report is consistent with the policy, evidence and current positions of Council, widely informed by community engagement and insight and the Brimbank Advocacy Plan 2023-25. Our Transforming Brimbank campaign is based on Council's Sunshine Priority Precinct Vision 2050 document that was conceived following extensive community consultation.

Resource And Risk Implications

Resource requirements can be met within the Annual Budget 2024/2025.

There are no Community, Environmental, Financial, Regulatory or Safety risks identified.

Legislation/Council Plan/Policy Context

This report supports the Council Plan 2021-2025 strategic direction and objective of:

1. People and Community - A welcoming, safe and supported community - An inclusive place for all

- Wellbeing and Belonging - Responsive services that support mental and physical

wellbeing

2. Places and Spaces - Liveable and connected neighbourhoods that support healthy and sustainable futures - A green place for all

- Liveable and Connected - Inviting and liveable spaces and facilities, connected so people can get around
- Sustainable and Green - Protect natural environments for current and future generations

3. Opportunity and Prosperity - A future focused, transforming city where all have opportunities to learn and earn - A prosperous place for all

- Growing and Transforming - Optimise community opportunities through infrastructure innovation and investment

4. Leadership and Governance - A high performing organisation that enacts the vision and decisions of Council through the delivery of quality and innovative services - A fairer place for all

- High Performing and Accountable - Our workforce strive to enhance services and liveability for the Brimbank community.

This report complies with the priorities identified in the Brimbank Advocacy Plan 2023-2025 and the Sunshine Priority Precinct 2050 Vision.

Council officers contributing to the preparation and approval of this report, have no conflicts of interests to declare.