

How to make the state great in eight years

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After its landslide election win this week, Labor might reasonably be expected to govern Victoria for the next eight years. What needs to be done to make our state the best it can be by 2026 and beyond? We asked a panel of experts for their blueprints for prosperity.



Sydney Rd, Brunswick VINCE CALIGIURI

Planning

Dr Elizabeth Taylor
Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT

In the 1880s, Victoria rode a property boom to create much of its enduring infrastructure and suburbs. It also ended with a spectacular bust, and an over-capitalised, under-utilised circular train route.

A considered view of history, however, contains lessons for planning in Victoria today.

[Growth in cars has outstripped population growth](#), yet 1950s-style planning processes still put car parking first in decisions to allocate urban space.

These discredited minimum parking policies should be replaced with better management of on-street parking. This will also shape how the city copes with emerging transport technologies.

Matching transport delivery to growth is critical to address inequalities between established and emerging areas of Melbourne.

Early delivery of buses, co-ordinated finance for rail corridors, and active transport options prioritising children's mobility are priorities.

The government also needs to address a decades-long backlog of essential and less-glamorous public transport works, including track duplications and electrification.

With growth in inner-city apartments, government needs to go beyond supply questions to address how apartments are lived in and governed over the long term.

Future-proofing Melbourne's apartment stock should also include universal design to accommodate changing demographics.

Precincts such as Fisherman's Bend present the opportunity to prioritise quality green spaces and early delivery of transport choices.

Congestion



Photo: Justin McManus

Craig Richards
CEO, Bicycle Network

Let's send all our politicians on a trip to Europe – economy class – to look at how the humble bicycle can bust congestion and boost happiness.

There may be a few loud people who'd like to see bike riding banned, but there's millions of Victorians who will replace short car trips with bike trips. All they need is places to ride away from vehicles and a society that embraces two wheels.

St Kilda Road needs to become one of the world's great bike boulevards. Sydney Road and Chapel Street need to transform into bike-friendly places Melburnians can pedal to when the coffee urge is calling.

Our rail trail network needs to continue to expand so everyone can enjoy life beyond Melbourne.

Infrastructure

Ian Harper
Dean of Melbourne Business School

Melbourne's population will keep growing over the next eight years, regardless of whether [the federal government cuts overseas immigration numbers](#).

Public transport projects such as the Metro Tunnel and Suburban Rail Loop will not solve the congestion problem on their own.

Victoria also needs a major review of the road network. I have been arguing for many years that Australia needs to adopt a system of paying for roads based on congestion, not simply on the number of vehicles you have or how much petrol you use.

The other difficult necessity is to make sure that access to the inner suburbs remains open to everyone. It is not enough to simply keep growing outwards, with new residents placed at the edges.

The type of knowledge economy that Melbourne is such an excellent example of will continue to flourish if we maintain a diverse group of people collaborating together in the heart of the city.

Housing



Photo: Robert Shakespeare

Dr Kate Shaw
Urban geographer, University of Melbourne

Victoria is in the grip of an affordable housing crisis and 40,000 households are on the public housing waiting list.

With an open paddock in front of the Labor government, we can reasonably expect significant and sustained investment in housing.

If half the annual \$7billion stamp duty revenue – a direct result of out-of-control property prices – were dedicated to public housing, we could build 14,000 new units a year. We need investment in moderate-income housing.

We need new financial institutions, including the state, to support community land trusts, tenants-in-common and self-build co-operatives that offer a company share rather than property title as security.

While the private property market is undergoing a slight and much-needed corrective, it still needs control.

Inclusionary zoning, after being toyed with in Victoria for 20 years, should become routine, with a significant proportion of new residential developments mandated for social housing.

With a big investment up-front in affordable housing, and judicious restraint of the private market, Victoria could have sustained and maintained housing for all. In eight years, we should almost have it sorted.

Energy

Dr Bruce Mountain
Director, Victoria Energy Policy Centre

The direction for a government intent on acting in the public interest for the next eight years is quite clear: reduce pollution and get prices down. Success in eight years' time will be an appreciably cleaner energy system and appreciably lower prices.

The two objectives are not mutually exclusive: the stone that will kill both these birds – renewable electricity – is available and thriving. The greatest gains are to be had by putting power back into customers' hands literally, not metaphorically.

Policy makers have favourable winds from technology change in digitalisation, distributed energy production and storage. The task now is to promote the customers' ability to extract the greatest share of the gains from this technology change.

This means resisting the subtle but increasingly desperate entreaties for protection by the industry's vested interests.

Mental Health





Professor Patrick McGorry EDDIE JIM

Patrick McGorry
Executive Director of Orygen

In Victoria today two out of three people with serious mental illness are unable to access specialist mental health care.

Community mental health services are minimal and short term. Emergency departments are flooded with people in crisis and life-threatening illnesses.

By default police and ambulance have become the front line of mental healthcare. GPs have been abandoned to manage complex mental illness without any expert backup.

In this context, [the Premier's pledge to hold a royal commission](#) is warmly welcomed. Only a royal commission can engage the Victorian community in embracing the depth of redesign, cultural reform and investment needed.

What can Victorians expect to see in eight years' time? At the heart we will find compassionate, accessible, stigma-free community health centres with an optimistic culture of care.

People will be able to form a trusting relationship with expert mental-health professionals that will endure beyond 10 sessions or an "episode of care" for as long as the person needs it.

Hospital and residential care will be therapeutic and not merely the crude management of risk. The small number of people whose untreated mental illnesses pose a risk to public safety will be detected early and treated wherever possible, and all mentally ill offenders will be treated in a forensic mental health system that is fit for purpose.

Education





Photo: Quentin Jones

Peter Goss
Grattan Institute, School Education Program Director

[Universal three-year-old kinder](#) will improve children's readiness for school – if the quality is high, and disadvantaged families actually use their 15 hours each week.

Labor has promised [100 new schools over eight years](#). Under Gonski 2.0, real funding for government schools will increase by about 15 per cent over a decade. These are huge investments. But to lift outcomes for all students, Education Minister James Merlino must create an adaptive school system that improves by design, not by chance.

This means a serious overhaul of how teachers develop on the job. The Education Department should be more explicit about what works best; school principals must set the bar high; and the detailed instructional leadership should come from top teachers, experts in their subject, whose day job is to spread effective practice within and across schools.

Environment



Photo: Jessica Shapiro

Dr Rebecca Spindler Bush
Heritage Australia Executive Manager - Science and Conservation

While some species are holding their own in the face of threats such as land clearing, invasive predators and climate change, the overall picture for Australian species and habitats is less

optimistic.

Many Australians are hopeful that these trends can be reversed, and while there is cause for hope, the next eight years will be vital in reversing some of the damage that has already been done.

We see the top three environmental priorities as: bringing forward land clearing laws that stop the destruction of habitats for short-term financial gain, and supporting efforts to protect what remains of Australia's unique ecosystems; controlling invasive weeds and animals; and acting now to reduce carbon emissions by 2050, in line with IPCC recommendations to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Population

Martine Letts
CEO, Committee for Melbourne

Melbourne needs a long-term plan for managing [population growth](#) and pressure on our transport infrastructure through an integrated densification and transport strategy.

Boundaries are growing unchecked and not connected to services and jobs. We can't keep "growing out" and should keep our regions in mind as part of one masterplan for an integrated approach to population growth.

Our transport system is under immense strain and we need to develop a 50-year public transport blueprint that integrates transport with land use, economic planning and technology.

We should consider making optimal use of the spare capacity in existing roads and public transport assets through the introduction of time-of-use charging, which is one of Infrastructure Victoria's priorities.

Waste

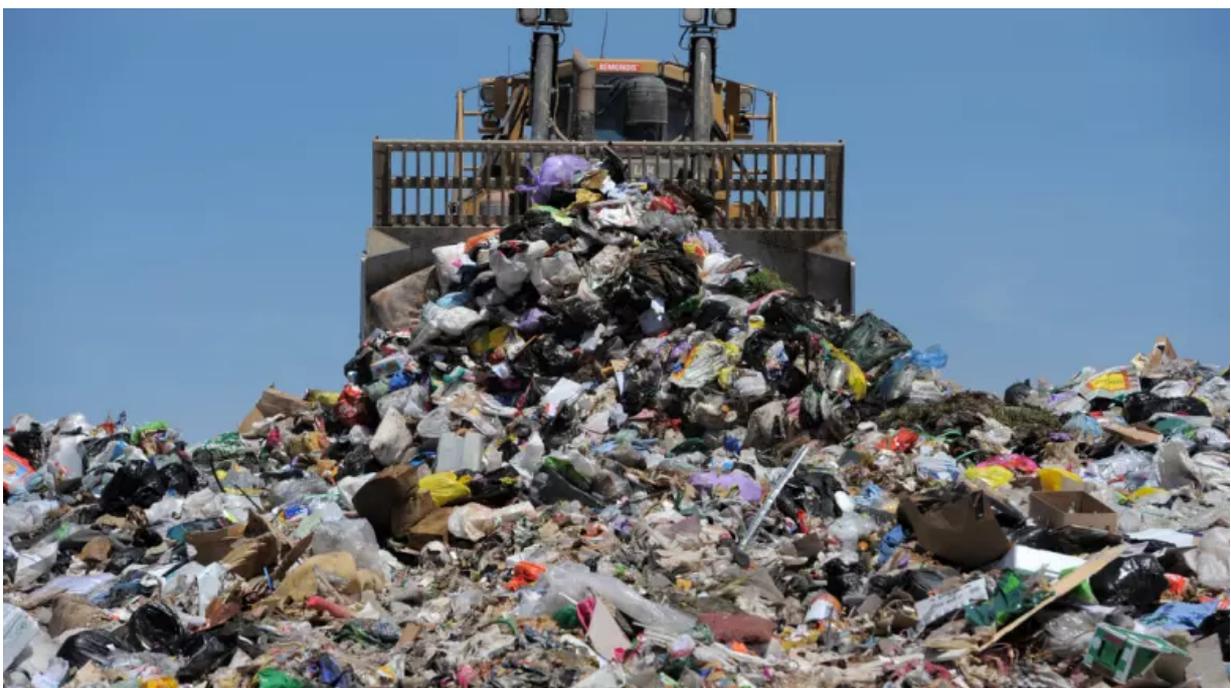


Photo: Graham Tidy

Ella Plumanns Pouton
Environmental politics, The University of Melbourne

Over the next four, perhaps eight years, the Victorian government has a rubbish challenge to deal with. The ultimate goal is to reduce our reliance on landfill for rubbish disposal.

A key part of this is to continue research and development of policies that support local government in recovery of organic waste from landfill, the setting up of clear standards, regulations and communication.

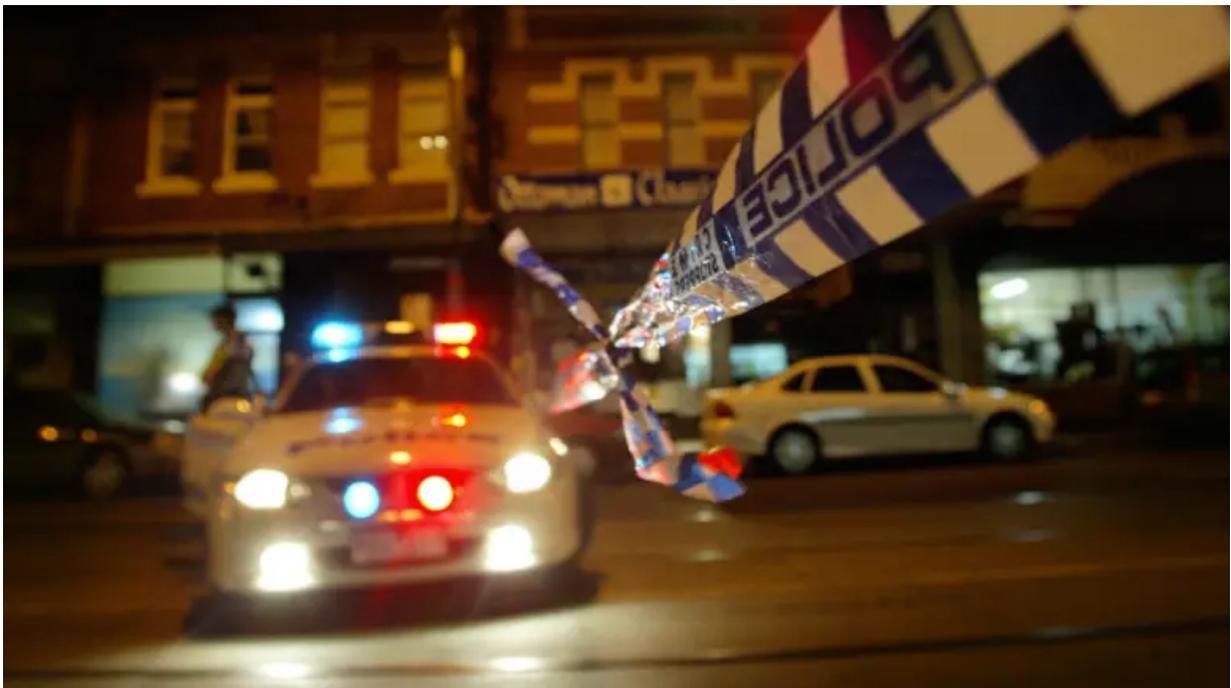
Another more ambitious part of resource recovery is the fostering of a climate of waste innovation in the private sector, supporting business to connect waste products with new business ventures and therefore diverting waste from the waste stream.

While the outcomes of this might not be visible for a decade, research and development of a program to support such initiatives is certainly possible within a term.

Another progressive initiative would be to develop and instigate a Victorian container deposit scheme. We also require a rapid investigation of solutions to where our recycling could go.

An investigation needs to result in finding the best way to invest in local plastic recycling infrastructure, such as subsidising local recycling plants, which in turn would create Victorian jobs.

Law and Order



PAUL HARRIS

John Silvester
Crime, The Age

Perhaps one of the lessons for the landslide state election is that tough-guy law-and-order policies are not the voters' number-one priority, which will enable the Andrews Government eight years to develop policies that are not based on a simplistic "lock 'em up" philosophy.

It has already effectively neutralised the police numbers bidding war, [introducing a system that registers the number of recruits required through a Staff Allocation Model \(SAM\)](#) that will try to set police numbers on needs rather than votes.

The government has already committed to bring Victoria in line with other states early next year by [introducing DNA laws](#), enabling police to take DNA mouth swabs from those charged with indictable offences to be tested against the 11,000 unsolved crimes where samples have been collected.

Police are confident this will solve thousands of crimes.

One of the big challenges is to deal with the growing problem of post-traumatic stress disorders in serving and former emergency service workers, and the government should immediately steal the opposition's policy of having prisoners train companion dogs for PTSD sufferers.

This system is a proven winner, providing a home for dogs destined to be put down, help for the mentally wounded and a sense of purpose for prisoners.

In the next few years, due to increased crime problems, mental health issues, drugs and a public appetite for jail time for offenders, the prison population will continue to rise, from about 8000 to a projected 10,000.

Hopefully [the promised royal commission into mental health](#) will explore the number of inmates with deep-seated intellectual, psychological and acquired brain injury conditions.

Terrorism will remain an ongoing threat and will only get worse. Counter-terror police have done a remarkable job but they are bears catching salmon swimming upstream. They grab plenty but eventually some have to get through.

Economy

Stephen Anthony
Chief Economist, Industry Super Australia

On tax reform, the Andrews government needs to pursue systematic changes, not just piecemeal adjustments.

They should incentivise fundamental state tax reform such as the replacement of stamp duties for land taxes, and introduction of betterment taxes as a hypothecated channel to fund greenfield infrastructure outlays; and offer these reforms up to the federal government in return for microeconomic reform grant incentives.

Second, to tackle population pressures, they should explicitly link government planning and state and local government housing approval processes to estimates of regional housing supply gaps and property hot spots.

Also, subject to labour-market shortages, they should encourage recent arrivals (temporary work and student visa holders) to reside in the regions.

They should discourage land hoarding by having state and local government agencies identify underutilised sites for residential redevelopment (especially affordable housing) and provide incentives to private land developers and charities to expedite the release of new blocks.

We need a supply chain review into each major Victorian export commodity. We need to know the impediments to value adding across all export supply chains.

Factors may include infrastructure bottlenecks, foreign ownership of processing assets, or even enterprise culture. For example, is the outright foreign takeover of Murray Goulburn by Fonterra in the national interest?

Human Rights

Kristen Hilton

Victorian Human Rights Commissioner

In the next eight years, every Victorian student should learn that their state was the first one to introduce a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities and what the Charter means.

All Victorians should understand the promise of our human rights laws – that each of us should be treated with equality, dignity and respect.

We should strengthen our Charter by creating better protections and avenues for redress where there have been human rights abuses. For many, access to proper healthcare and adequate housing are the most important concerns.

These should be included in our Charter as fundamental human rights and supported by enduring investment into health and housing.

We must face up to the truth of our past and develop a treaty with Aboriginal people that reflects their special place in this state and ensure that Aboriginal people have control over those decisions which affect their daily lives.

There is no doubt that a more gender-equal society will reduce discrimination, harassment and violence against women.

A change in attitude toward greater respect for women should be supported by changes to regulation and enforcement to prevent harassment and discrimination from occurring and to hold people to account when it does.

If we are committed to gender pay equity, then we should introduce legislation that creates an expectation that women in like roles get paid at the same rate as men.

Our children should go to school in the knowledge that they can be themselves. On this score, we should change the Equal Opportunity Act to ensure that schools cannot expel a child or refuse to enrol a child because of their sexuality or gender identity.

We should also ensure [that LGBTI teachers are not discriminated against in schools.](#)
