

1 September 2021

World Records are generally hailed as a good thing in an Olympic year, right?

Well, not always. On 23 September, with 235 lockdown days, Melbourne will have beaten the world record currently held by Buenos Aires at 234. On 23 September, “Baby Steps Freedom” day, Victorians can exercise further and for longer, but still not produce, perform or sell anything much.

At the Committee for Melbourne, we have said for some time that we cannot wait for the eradication of COVID-19 to plan for our economic and community recovery.

We are pleased that Premier Andrews now recognises that we cannot eradicate COVID-19 from the community. What we have not seen enough of is collaboration with the productive sector of our community, the business, knowledge, performing, hospitality, service and visitor sectors which are being severely damaged by these extensive restrictions.

All sectors will play a key role in our city’s recovery from this health crisis, which risks being eclipsed by a far deeper, and longer-term economic crisis. The majority of our members tell us that they expect Melbourne’s economic recovery from COVID-19 to take between two and five years. Some say between five and 10 years.

We need to move the narrative beyond infection numbers and focus on vaccination numbers, and the effectiveness of vaccinations reducing serious illness and death. This is also how we can help protect our health systems from being overrun.

Our road to recovery must be based on close collaboration between government, business and community. Nowhere is this more important than in the **acceleration of the vaccine roll-out, rapid antigen testing availability, effective isolation, and a nationally consistent and internationally recognisable system for vaccine passports**, engaging business and the community for successful delivery.

We call on all our governments to work together to accelerate the roll-out of the vaccines, including advertising programs, targeting of vaccine doses, opening up to all age groups, and using businesses and industry to assist with vaccine roll-outs where possible. Business is up for it.

We need a **transparent, consistent plan** to help all sectors of the economy recover and rebuild, based on a phased, ambitious return to the CBD and a commitment to reopen for good once government mandated vaccination targets are met. Our city is the beating heart of our State’s economy, and we must focus on its recovery for the State to fully recover.

Concurrently we need to **increase support to sectors most hard hit**. For example, Victoria’s visitor economy is on its knees now and must be supported to recover. We commend the Victorian Tourism Industry Council’s (VTIC) 4-Point Survival Plan to support the sector to 70 – 80% vaccination thresholds and beyond. Melbourne’s heart and soul, the performing, sporting and events sectors have gone into hibernation, and are haemorrhaging staff. They don’t just need short term relief, they need bums on seats, continuously, with support, like insurance, to accommodate multiyear planning horizons.

For **our productivity and mental health**, our kids must get back to school and sports and recreation activities need to get back to normal as soon as possible.

We need to bring students, skilled labour, investors and business delegations back. That means **global vaccination passports** as well as **getting on with the construction of bespoke quarantine facilities** near our airports such as Mickleham Quarantine Centre. Then our airports can welcome travellers at numbers fit for a serious city. Then our hotels can go back to doing what they do best: look after visitors who will participate in our world class business conferences and events, fill our theatres, stadiums, museums, restaurants and universities.

We need to **shore up our health systems to cope with the additional load expected from living with COVID** – even when we have reached the desired vaccine thresholds. Melbourne has the opportunity to lead the way. We have world class medical research and manufacturing capacity. Booster doses will be the norm. Future variants may require further research. Accelerating our R&D in Melbourne and increasing domestic production to secure supply will be important.

If we can open up and support our business and community, Melbourne's foundational attributes such as open spaces, arts and culture, research and education institutions industry can once again prosper and thrive as restrictions are eased.

The Committee's 150 cross-sectoral membership has already delivered a suite of ideas for Melbourne's recovery in its Road to Recovery Plan, comprising affordable housing, transport, international education, the visitor economy, digital infrastructure, arts and culture and technology investment.

Collaboration is the power of the Committee's networked and committed membership and the foundation stone for the Committee's formation in the 1980s, the last time Melbourne was in deep trouble.

We can win world records again for the right things – but we need government, business and the community to work together to reclaim our status as one of the world's most successful and liveable cities.

Scott Tanner – Chair, Committee for Melbourne

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ABOUT COMMITTEE FOR MELBOURNE

Committee for Melbourne (the Committee) works towards shaping a better future for Greater Melbourne. Together with our members, we make a difference by challenging the status quo and encouraging thought leadership to create change through confident and influential advocacy.

With over 150 member organisations drawn from across Greater Melbourne's major corporations, small and medium businesses, academic institutions, local government and not-for-profit entities, the Committee is an active connector.

The Committee's work embraces four key pillars: Future Economy, Infrastructure, Urban Optimisation and Liveability. Working with, and on behalf of our members, the Committee aims to ensure Melbourne's challenges and opportunities are addressed in ways that keep our city vital, inclusive, progressive and sustainable.