

Herald Sun

EDITORIAL

We cannot live on past glories

Back in 2017, Melburnians felt the sting sharply when, after seven straight years, the Victorian capital lost its celebrated mantle as the world's most liveable city.

Even so, amid rising congestion, escalating costs and our public services and infrastructure being stretched, there had been a scepticism among even proud Melburnians about the formula used to crown this city as the planet's best place to live.

We knew, despite the bragging rights and handy marketing slogan of being the "world's most liveable city" – as assessed by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Liveability Index – that Melbourne had lost some of its sparkle and easy way of life.

That's not, of course, to doubt Melbourne's deserved reputation as a vibrant, multicultural success story, and a culinary, sporting and major events mecca, not just in Australia but confirming this as a city of international standing.

And even though many Victorians may take Melbourne for granted, last year the Global Liveability Index still ranked us the third-most liveable city in the world – behind Vienna and Copenhagen – and still the most liveable in Australia.

In today's Herald Sun, further evidence is provided about Melbourne's position as a world-class metropolis with the annual Benchmarking Melbourne report having us well-placed across some of the criteria used to judge 19 other peer-like cities overseas.

The Committee for Melbourne and JLL report, which is informed by more than 500 discrete comparative metrics, finds Victoria's commercial, cultural, employment, sporting, educational and employment heart remains one of the best places in the world to live and work.

But Melbourne has also been marked by distinct signs of growing pains.

While the state government's

\$100bn-plus Big Build agenda is being rolled out partly to ingest our rampant growing population, that level of infrastructure catch-up comes with its own huge costs – leading to a horrendously big state debt (\$178bn by 2027) – and has turned the CBD and its arterial surrounds into a giant worksite.

Now in its third assessment, Benchmarking Melbourne – which compared 20 peer cities from across the globe, including London, Berlin, San Francisco, Boston, Singapore, Taipei, Sydney and Brisbane – found more must be done to address Greater Melbourne's "underlying weaknesses" in connectivity and housing.

The 2024 report shows Melbourne is sprawling faster than any of its comparative peers, and its geographic footprint now makes it the fourth-biggest city among the group.

That in itself shows how big a challenge efficient commuting, public, private and commercial transport has become for Victoria.

According to the analysis, Melbourne scored highly in categories relating to culture, influence and wellbeing, but sub-par when it came to connectivity, innovation and technology.

Out of the benchmark's nine defining wide-sweep categories, Melbourne failed to make the top half of the 20 peer cities in five infrastructure and economic areas.

We ranked 14th on connectivity, efficiency, innovation and technology; 13th on environmental outcomes, and 11th on global reach and resilience.

On the positive, four liveability areas did better than most, with a fourth ranking in the "experience economy" due to major sporting, entertainment and cultural events.

But we cannot simply sit on the laurels of the success of our major events.

We must get the state's finances in order and get on with backing businesses, building more homes and getting some shine back into the CBD.

Gun risk remains

Alarmingly, some 200,000 illicit firearms are believed to be in the nation, according to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

And Victorian Crime Stoppers chief executive Stella Smith says that figure is likely to be just the tip of a dangerous iceberg.

Today, the Herald Sun reports new police figures that show a drop of almost 20 per cent in unwanted or unlicensed guns being handed in across the state last year.

At least 2665 firearms were given to Victoria Police and licensed dealers under the permanent national firearms amnesty.

In 2023, they included more than 1000 rifles, 700 shotguns, 550 air rifles and 125 hand guns.

While some plateauing in the number of surrendered firearms was expected as the amnesty rolled on, the problem now appears to be, largely, a cohort of people who believe their unregistered gun will not be missed or detected.

What they ignore is the real danger of those weapons falling into the wrong hands.

Criminals target rural and other properties for firearms, and those guns can then be used to kill.

Owners should do the right thing and hand over unregistered or unwanted guns.

Your Say



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A lift for the Liberals

The surprise result of the Redbridge poll which gives the Liberal Party a boost in the polls may lift Liberal Party morale but it remains to be seen if it is Labor doing the damage or if the Liberal Party are in fact gaining popularity through policies ("Pesutto's poll reprieve", HS, 25/3).

The state budget is coming up which is expected to be nasty and if the Liberal Party and especially John Pesutto do not perform well then Pesutto will have to go and the party will need a leader who can attract younger voters through social media and strongly attack the Allan government.

Of course the Allan government is starting to cut staff at the big build and to attack the spiralling debt.

By the next election some of the big build projects will be complete and Victorians will see the benefits of the large infrastructure projects.

The Liberal Party still has to inform the Victorian voters how they intend to cut the debt without causing the Victorian economy to go into recession because of the increased unemployment.

Russell Morse, Karingal

Rematch for voters

It will be interesting to see Tim Wilson take on Zoe Daniel in a rematch for Wilson's former seat at the next election ("Wilson to fight for Goldstein again", HS, 25/3).

The community support for Daniel was not so much a protest against Wilson but was based on policies of the LNP overall. These included the climate crisis, integrity in political advertising and donations and gender equality.

Despite the Liberals committing to net zero, voters did not trust them to take real action. Wilson did support measures to promote policies on EVs and offshore wind farms but failed to convince the party to adopt them.

This time round, Tim Wilson needs to convince Goldstein that both he and the LNP will act on climate and on the other key issues.

In order to form the next government, Peter Dutton will need to do the same overall and flip a dozen or so other electorates.

John Hughes, Mentone

Rough run for Dutton

After a less than impressive result in the Dunkley federal by-election, the historic loss of a Liberal seat in South Australia's Dunstan by-election and a heavy 12 per cent swing against Tasmania's coalition government, maybe a Peter Dutton-led party is unelectable?

Kev Burke, Sandringham

Life skills in sport

As a youngster learning to catch a ball was fun but also, as turns out, is a life skill. The editorial "Kids must get back to sports" (HS, 25/3) is essential advice.

The simplicity of catching a ball

TEXT TALK

Rod Snee (TT, 25/3) the only reason Rudd got the US ambassador position was to keep him out of Albo's sight. Rudd certainly doesn't have the diplomatic requirements or the grace to go with the position.

Deeja, Rochester

No Hospital should ever have to fundraise. They should be the highest priority of every government.

Baz, Torquay

To Tasmanian voters, all Australian voters, when will you learn a vote for the Greens is a vote for Labor. If you don't want to vote Liberals or Nationals choose independents carefully.

Penny, Malvern

I'd suggest Andrew Bolt, that your denial of the stolen generations presents a slightly more damaging "lie or fantasy about Aboriginal history" than any you claim Bruce Pascoe may assert.

Tony, Mordialloc

Governments need to wake up to the fact that changing demographics make it more likely that women will vote for a woman because she is a woman and not necessarily for her campaign promises or party.

Carmel, Hampton

The picture of the four Collingwood players attending the Grand Prix is ironic as their season has started from the pits.

Grizzleguts, Aspendale

AFL should seriously consider suspending Essendon's Peter Wright for the rest of the year. Go hard, stop this irresponsible "legal" bashing of opposition players.

Susan, Somerville

The Tasmanian election proves just how many dreamers live in Tasmania. I didn't think there were that many dreamers in such a small area.

Brian Foxwell, Cranbourne East

teaches you time related to distance, the same skills required driving.

There are so many other life skills learned from playing sport that teach you to cope with life, those that do not get an opportunity to participate are at a disadvantage.

David Yaffe, Melbourne

Getting kids involved

Unfortunately the rapid decline in children's engagement in sport has more to do with the progressive indoctrination of children away from

competitive sport, away from physical education altogether ("Kids must get back to sport", HS, 25/3).

Every child is capable of participating in life-enhancing, esteem-building physical education and sport. Unfortunately, physical education has become the "Cinderella subject" of the modern curriculum.

PE teachers, once an essential component of every school's staff, have become either reduced in scale or eliminated completely.

The Herald Sun's editorial is spot on in stating that formal sports such as cricket, football, netball and tennis are a "...vital part of childhood development, not just for physical strength and agility, but for teaching teamwork".

Perhaps the impact of our recent Covid epidemic may have indeed exacerbated this increasing problem of children's self confidence, self esteem and resilience.

It has often been said that Australia "punches above its weight" in all sporting codes, however if we continue to neglect the basics from early primary school, then we cannot expect to see such outstanding performances continue. More significantly, the individual physical and mental health of our children will be undermined, their potential sporting talents left undeveloped.

Lyle Geyer, Essendon

Raining tradie dollars

The news that we will need 90,000 new tradies to cope with the projected new Australian home build must have been music to the collective ears of the Australian motor industry.

The prospect of all those tradies buying 90,000 new utes and equipping them with the plethora of paraphernalia that seem to be obligatory additions to their vehicles, amounts to a truly formidable wad of cash injected to that industry's bottom line.

Long gone are the days of being known as the country that survives by riding on the sheep's back. We are now heading down the dusty road to our economic future wearing hi-vis, a hard hat and driving a Ford Ranger.

Neil Wilson, Launceston Tas

Itching to stop spread

Mosquitoes are menaces and are considered the world's deadliest animal. That Asian tiger mosquitoes are spreading across Europe due to an ever-warming climate, threatening the health of those at the upcoming Paris Olympics is concerning ("Mozzies move in" HS, 25/3).

We are not immune to the spread of mosquitoes and their diseases either.

In 2022, Japanese encephalitis, a tropical disease, made it to Victoria, carried by mosquitoes spreading ever further south. Slowing the march of these disease ridden pests is just another reason to take the sting out of climate change.

Amy Hillier, Kew

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TAC

67

Victorian road deaths this year

73

Road deaths as of the same day last year

Mark Knight



A great city can't stand still

Mark Melvin



As Melburnians, we never rest on our laurels. Our unmatched foodie culture, unrivalled access to local and international entertainment, and our year-round sporting calendar gives our city its edge over others.

Melbourne is the envy of every other Australian city, and even some of the best cities in Europe and the US. With so much to love, it's no wonder that our great city continues to expand, accommodating growing numbers of new Melburnians and tourists as the post-pandemic crowds return.

Just last year we overtook Sydney as the biggest city, by population, in Australia. It's something we should be proud of.

But this type of growth comes with baggage. What will this continued growth look like for one of the world's most liveable cities?

Today, Committee for Melbourne with JLL released the third annual independent Benchmarking Melbourne report, which shows how our city compares to 19 peer cities across the world. This is crucial information for Victorian's policymakers and city leaders to identify areas where we can improve and recognise areas where it is already excelling.

As the world's most cultural city, it's unsurprising Melbourne continues to rank in the top 10, and as high as fourth, in the experience economy for our year-round tourism appeal and attractions. We remain as popular as ever in sport, arts, parks and tourism, but we face growing strategic challenges that must be addressed to help us remain competitive when it comes to liveability, business attraction and connectivity.

With so many new faces in Melbourne, we're seeing more low-density houses built in the western and northern suburbs. When cities grow as quickly as ours, this puts more pressure on transport, housing, and infrastructure. To remain connected in the outer suburbs, the trend of locals taking to the car has been more than twice as sharp as in other cities, putting us in the top 10 per cent of global cities for hours lost to congestion.

This is not sustainable. We need to make sure we're maintaining high standards right across the board – not just for those within a few kilometres of the CBD. The Victorian government is working on long-term solutions to address some big-picture infrastructure issues, primarily through the Big Build. But, in the meantime, Melbourne cannot afford to stand still.

Mark Melvin is chief executive of The Committee for Melbourne

Poll signals stirrings of hope for Pesutto's party

Polling out this week should be a shot in the arm for Liberal leader John Pesutto. It shows the Coalition now leads Labor 38 to 36 per cent on primary vote intentions, which means for the first time in three years it is attracting more voters than Labor.

The Coalition still trails miserably on a two-party preferred basis, 54 to 46, meaning if an election were held today it would be thumped.

It might pick up a seat or two, but preferences from the minor parties would deliver the Coalition a fourth successive defeat.

Still, Pesutto and his supporters will be buoyed by these numbers.

Among the Opposition Leader's critics there may remain a view that even the proverbial drover's dog would lead the Allan government right now. And a question of why the primary vote lead is not bigger.

We are now six weeks out from the next state budget, and we should expect nothing but a fiscal bloodbath.

For months Treasurer Tim Pallas has been preparing us for as much, as the government tries to rein in spending and reverse projections that Victoria will have accrued \$178bn of net debt by 2027.

Expect savage cuts across the public sector, service delivery to take a beating, and debt levels to rise higher still.

Because there are only three quick ways to lower our debt: cut spending, raise taxes or sell assets.

Shannon Deery



There is little left to sell, and significant new or raised taxes would be hugely damaging for the government following successive budgets in which it has whacked higher taxes on big business and mum-and-dad investors. It leaves the Treasurer in the unenviable position of being forced to cut spending to make a dent in the budget.

There is significant anger among some very senior government figures that more was not done to address the most pressing economic issues in last year's budget.

Instead they feel Daniel Andrews took the easy road knowing he was set to sail into retirement on his \$300,000-a-year life pension.

It's left Jacinta Allan with an economic time bomb that should play into Pesutto's hands. In the 10 years since the ALP came to power in 2014, Victoria's finances have tanked.

In that time, the government's wages bill has almost doubled, as have taxes.

Total taxes across the state were \$18.3bn, they're now forecast to be about \$35.6bn by the next election – a 94 per cent increase.

But are we getting double the benefit for our super-sized wages bill and tax output?

Are we spending half the time waiting in emergency departments, or are police arriving at crime scenes twice as fast? Are our roads better? Is our quality of life doubly improved?

In 2015 we had about 13,052 full-time police, compared to 15,842 now.

And yet they are responding to fewer calls for help than they were, and last year fell almost 40,000 dispatches short of the 900,000 target.

Under-resourced police are also missing key crime solving targets, leaving distressed victims of crime waiting much longer than needed for outcomes.

In 2015 Victorian paramedics were responding to Code 1 lights and sirens calls within the target 15 minutes in 74.3 per cent of cases. Latest figures show that result has dropped to 62.8 per cent, despite almost 2000 more paramedics being on the job.

In 2015, Victoria's 1877 firefighters shared in \$201m in salaries and \$16m in overtime. Fast forward to today and we're paying 3813 employees \$518m in wages and \$104m in overtime. And yet the number of structure fires responded to within the target time has fallen from 88 to 83.7 per cent.

Our road network is quite literally in disrepair, we're in the grip of a housing crisis, and business leaders say Victoria is no longer "the place to be". And already underfunded hospitals are being told to slash spending and find savings.

The release of last week's Auditor-

General's report into the Commonwealth Games, prompted by an opposition referral, answered many questions, but it raised more.

Like, how can we have any faith that other Victorian projects are being managed properly?

The Games budget blew out from \$2.6bn to "about \$7bn", the government claimed in justification for scrapping the event.

The Auditor-General found the likely cost to be significantly less, at about \$4.9bn.

But if a relatively small event with an initial budget of \$2.6bn can be so monumentally bungled, can we really have faith in any other project?

Whether it's the Suburban Rail Loop – with an estimated cost in excess of \$100bn – or a simple suburban road upgrade?

Allegations by the Labor-aligned Australian Workers' Union of dodgy deals, standover tactics and alleged corruption on Big Build sites have been referred to the state's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, care of the opposition.

Its findings, if an inquiry proceeds, could be far more illuminating than the Commonwealth Games report.

Given just how much is going awry in Victoria, Pesutto's critics may well ask why his lead is not bigger.

But for now it may give him the breathing room he needs to make some real headway.

Shannon Deery is Herald Sun state politics editor