

11 July 2008

The Secretary
The Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development
and Local Government
House Of Representatives
Parliament House
PO Box 6021
Canberra ACT 2600

**SUBMISSION FROM GEELONG CULTURAL PRECINCT LEADERSHIP GROUP
TO THE HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Terms of Reference 1: Funding of regional programs in order to invest in
genuine and accountable community infrastructure projects.**

Historically, the focus for government investment has tended toward projects that directly build physical infrastructure, economic strength and deliver social services. This submission draws the House Standing Committee's attention to the vital contribution that well planned, high quality cultural facilities and precincts, such as performing arts centres, art galleries and libraries, make to liveability, growth and community well being.

In modern Australia, cultural activity is as central to thriving regional communities as are jobs, roads and services. Therefore any regional program seeking to invest in community infrastructure projects should recognise cultural infrastructure as an intrinsic element of the overall investment mix.

The priorities for any investment in community infrastructure projects should be to:

- Improve liveability
- Add economic value and
- Update existing community infrastructure and address critical infrastructure gaps.

Liveability – The Victorian Government's work on regional growth shows that regional cities are growing because people find them attractive places to live. Geelong is a prime example of this growth model. Federal and State Government investment in rail and road infrastructure are good examples of government investment in infrastructure to enhance liveability.

The Masterplan for the redevelopment of the Geelong Cultural Precinct (developed by the State Government, Council and Geelong's major cultural facilities) offers the same type of investment opportunity. Once delivered, the redeveloped and expanded precinct will be a major contributor to liveability in this region, both in terms of the range of activities that it will contain – new Geelong Library and Heritage Centre, refurbished Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, expanded Performing Arts Centre and with the Art Gallery strategically realigned and trebled in size - and also because of the exciting physical environment it will create with public art, streetscape landscaping, cafes and bars and Johnstone Park infrastructure.

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Creativity and economic value – Geelong itself is changing, transitioning from a manufacturing and agricultural economy to service industries, education, tourism and a diverse range of business interests.

With this economic growth comes population growth and demographic change. More affordable housing also makes this city attractive to a younger demographic joining those making the sea-change with the time, disposable income and natural inclination to seek out cultural events. The pressure is on to continue the change process and the city needs to adapt and provide services of a scale appropriate to this increasing population.

Aside from an attractive and affordable place to live they are also looking for good education, health, culture and recreational opportunities.

Investment in “Creative hubs”, such as a revitalised Geelong Cultural Precinct, combines artistic, business, social and economic imperatives. By assisting the cultural organisations to expand their artistic programs with state-of-the-art infrastructure, they in turn will build their businesses, become destinations in their own right, attract more visitors, improve the liveability of the city, build civic pride and contribute to economic growth.

Update and fill infrastructure gaps – Governments tend to invest heavily in roads and rail, health, and educational facilities while cultural facilities tend to lag behind or be ignored altogether; and consequently many cultural assets are tired, old or even non-existent.

Regional communities are struggling to meet servicing demands and are unable to fund the necessary infrastructure for a balanced community outcome. It is apparent that funding from both State & Federal governments is needed to meet these needs.

Terms of reference 2: Minimize administrative cost and duplication for taxpayers

Working in partnerships across all levels of Government can achieve this goal. For example, partnerships lead to common goals and shared financial responsibility can reduce timelines and hence associated costs.

The Geelong Cultural Precinct has cultural assets owned and funded by State and Local Governments and community memberships and they are working together to develop and deliver on the Masterplan.

In more general terms, grants schemes that have:

- Clear, understandable guidelines
- A simple but thorough application process
- Consistent interpretation of guidelines
- Transparency in decision making
- Independent assessment at arms length from Government
- Timely assessment and communication of decisions
- Communication with communities re their own priorities

are generally delivered in more cost effective ways.



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