

Civic Centre & Postal Address

511 Burwood Hwy, Wantirna South VIC 3152

e knoxcc@knox.vic.gov.au w www.knox.vic.gov.au

11 March 2011

Mr Andrew Gowan
Secretariat
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications.
Inquiry into the Role and Potential of the National Broadband Network
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Gowan,

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK

Knox City Council is pleased to have this opportunity to provide input to the Government's deliberations on the importance of a globally competitive broadband capacity to the future prosperity and liveability of our nation.

Reflecting our firm belief that the overall benefit of the NBN derives from its capacity to assist with integration across a wide range of community and government endeavours, we have presented our views under the headings of *Economy*, *Society* and *Environment*.

ECONOMY

The City of Knox is a community of over 155,000 residents in the outer eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne. The city is also home to some 14,500 businesses that create an annual Gross Regional Product (GRP) of around \$8 billion.

Whilst the bulk of these businesses are small, even home-based, businesses, a significant portion, (some 22 percent), are involved in various forms of manufacturing activity and it is here that the wealth of the Knox community is created. As a city developed mainly since the 1970s, traditional manufacturers such as textiles, clothing and footwear, furniture, and automotive are not present in significant numbers, resulting in much of our manufacturing economy being focused in advanced production and technologies.

Firms in these fields will increasingly look to national and international markets for their growth, success in which will be highly dependent upon strong design innovation capability and performance in the development of their products and services. High capacity, reliable broadband access will be critical to achieving these business successes and to the provision of the new employment opportunities they will provide.

It is also considered likely that the NBN will encourage the development of new industry and business activities in Knox. The ability to obtain, share, modify, record and utilise information across a diversely-located business network will enable local business opportunities that may previously have felt the need to be closer to the city centre to enable these processes to occur efficiently, can now establish in Knox.

SOCIETY

With minimal, and difficult to access public transport options in the outer east of Melbourne, Knox residents, business people and students also need to travel considerably to share information, interact, deliver services, attend classes and so on. This creates a car-dependant community with associated high levels of greenhouse gas emission. Council's efforts to improve the liveability and sustainability of its community will be enhanced greatly through the provision of a high quality NBN.

The provision of additional connective technologies will enable our residents to increasingly seek to work from home, to access information, undertake web-based education, and participate in online entertainment. Already this usage is significant with 67.5 percent of Knox resident reporting an internet connection in the 2006 Census, compared with a Melbourne average of 61.0 percent. Of this, just below 50 percent involves a broadband connection.

The NBN will significantly enhance Council's capacity to deliver services and programs to our community in a wide variety of ways, particularly improving our own connectivity between our sites, and also enabling larger segments of our community to access our services online through improved and broader fast internet access.

Mobile and wireless connectivity will also widen and improve our service delivery channels to our community. Community engagement mechanisms will also be an important opportunity and Council's existing use of technologies associated with *Facebook*, *LinkedIn* and *Twitter* can expand accordingly.

In addition, the wider community can also benefit from an increased range of "direct" health applications of the NBN such as access to specialist services locally rather than having to travel into the city.

There are also the less tangible, but equally important, benefits such as greater connectivity and links between members of the community, better access to health and other information, support for life-long learning. Important to the Knox community, with the fire-prone Dandenong Ranges on its eastern boundary, is the crucial role that broadband plays in the conduct of emergency services activity during times of fire and severe weather events.

Of particular relevance to Council is the potential for NBN to enhance democratic procedures, increase citizen participation, make information more accessible, and allow for greater community connectivity.

ENVIRONMENT

Knox City Council is keen to ensure that the impact of the roll-out on its natural environment is minimised, and well managed. Council's city planning, sustainability and parks services could combine to assist an NBN contractor who is doing 'on ground' works. Visits to proposed sites before works commence and advice provided on the best way for underground cables (where applicable) to go through any significant vegetation areas. In some cases slight deviations or above ground cabling may be required, or thrust boring under significant vegetation. The City of Knox retains only 4 percent of the local native vegetation and therefore it is critical that we preserve this.

We therefore extend an open invitation to NBN Co to communicate with us very early in the project on the locations and the timeframes of the roll out. Council would consider appointing an officer in charge of the NBN project to liaise regularly with the contractor. In sites of

biological significance it is not only the trees and shrubs that are important but also the ground covers which include indigenous grasses that can look unimportant to the untrained eye and often are destroyed through ignorance.

Council is also custodian of approximately \$1.1 billion worth of community infrastructure and it is crucial that the rollout be done in such a way that consideration is given to not only the natural environment but the built assets and features of our city to ensure that any potential for impact from the rollout on Council's infrastructure.

TAKING A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In the context of the above comments, Council also offers the suggestion that the procedures for the roll-out of the NBN, and indeed many of the benefits it can deliver, could be more effectively understood and facilitated by working through the existing regional groupings that exist throughout most of the country. In Melbourne East for example, there is a regional group of Council CEOs, an economic development group, many community, service delivery and environmental groups, business groups and regional meetings of local and state government staff.

In addition, the Melbourne East Regional Development Australia Committee, (MERDAC), is also developing a regional plan that places some emphasis on regional connectivity, and is working to achieve a collaborative approach to the delivery and utilisation of services and programs across all three levels of government.

All of these groups could potentially assist in the creation of a coordinated approach to roll-out if engaged with directly by NBNCo. Such groups could be provided with resources to enable a more active role in the development of NBN delivery and take up.

SUMMARY

Council believes the NBN has the potential to provide positive economic, social and environmental outcomes across all eight points outlined in the Inquiry Terms of Reference, and looks forward to ongoing engagement with the processes for delivery for the roll-out of the NBN and will contribute actively where possible.

Should you require further information in relation to our comments, please contact Council's Economic Development Coordinator, Mr Peter Chaffey, on _____ or by email at _____. Mr Chaffey is also available to participate in any hearing/forum that the Inquiry may convene in Melbourne.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views on his important national project.

Yours sincerely,

ANGELO KOURAMBAS
Director, City Development

