9 September 2025

Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC
Treasurer
Level 4, 1 Treasury Place
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
Email: jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Treasurer

2026/27 Pre-Budget Submission

I am writing to seek your consideration for NORTH Link's key priorities in the 2026/27 State Budget and ongoing policy considerations.

NORTH Link is the pre-eminent organisation representing – and advocating for – economic development in northern metropolitan Melbourne. Members span the education, health, research, industry and government sectors, all with a shared desire to attract and create jobs, innovation, investment and opportunity in Melbourne's North.

Our detailed Pre-Budget submission is included below.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this submission in greater detail. In the meantime, if you or your office should require further information, please contact me on 0417 353 650 or via email at c.james@latrobe.edu.au .

Yours sincerely,

Chris James

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NORTH Link 2026-27
Victorian Pre-Budget Submission and Advocacy Document

Introduction: A Call to Invest in Melbourne's North

Melbourne's North is home to one in five Melburnians and is projected to grow to 1.5 million people by 2036. Despite its critical role in Victoria's future, the region has experienced decades of underinvestment. NORTH Link and our partners urge the Victorian Government to act now: unlock the economic and social potential of this vital region through coordinated planning, targeted infrastructure funding, and strategic precinct activation.

This document outlines key investment opportunities and advocacy priorities to ensure Melbourne's North drives Victoria's next wave of growth, innovation and prosperity.

Key Advocacy Priorities

1. Prioritise and Activate Strategic Economic Precincts

a. Northern Innovation and Sustainability Precinct (NISP)

A $5 billion plus 'University City' precinct anchored by La Trobe University that will deliver over 20,000 knowledge economy jobs and support Victoria's energy transition.

Support required for broader NISP, also encompassing Heidelberg Health Precinct, Northland Urban Renewal Precinct and Heidelberg West Business Park.

Key asks:

- Fund precinct master planning and infrastructure coordination ($20 million over two years)
- Deliver rapid bus network
- Support Banyule and Darebin City Council NISP Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program submission to the Federal Government, with a focus on enabling energy and digital infrastructure
- Support the development of new housing across the North. This includes supporting the development of La Trobe University City which will include a significant amount of in-fill development.

- Advocate to the Commonwealth for an increase in international students allocated to Victoria.

b. Beveridge Intermodal Precinct (BIP)

A nationally significant freight and logistics hub and local employment generator with strategic links to the national freight network, including Inland Rail and the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road. The Government's decision to bring forward planning of the Northern Freight Precinct as a Horizon 1 priority as part of the VPA 10-year greenfield forward program is acknowledged.

Key Asks:

- Continue to progress timely approvals for the staged delivery of the BIP that are within the State's control
- Provide planning certainty through State-led planning and zoning for the balance of the Northern Freight Precinct
- Confirm alignment with staged delivery of Inland Rail and future OMR/E6 in the 2026–27 budget cycle

c. OMR/ E6 and Hume Upgrade

Underpin growth of Melbourne's Outer North and West with OMR/E6 construction. The OMR/E6 is essential for shifting freight traffic from inner suburban roads and enabling efficient east-west movement across outer Melbourne. The OMR/E6 is the fundamental enabling infrastructure to unlock the potential of Melbourne's outer suburbs.

The Hume Freeway is now at capacity, straining under the pressure of significant population growth, industrial expansion, and surging freight volumes. As Melbourne's north grows to 1.5 million people over the coming decades, long-term planning and expansion of the Hume Freeway is urgently required to unlock these emerging communities and ensure that the Hume can remain an efficient freight and commuter spine.

Key asks:

- The Victorian and Australian Governments must urgently fund the business case, including detailed planning and corridor protection of the OMR/E6 to keep pace with growth, support long-term economic development, and safeguard Melbourne's liveability
- We are seeking $20 million to undertake a comprehensive feasibility and scoping study for the Hume Freeway expansion. This foundational step will unlock future planning, design and construction phases.

d. Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre (MAC)

Anchored by Northern Hospital, DPV Health, Melbourne Polytechnic Epping campus and the Melbourne Market, this precinct will support health, logistics and employment growth.

Key asks:

- Reserve the Wollert Rail transport corridor and publish the Wollert Rail study
- Improve bus connections and services.
- Support public health infrastructure expansion at Northern Hospital
- DPV Health: Operational funding to establish
  - Women's sexual and productive health hub, Epping: $250,000
  - Community Health Pharmacotherapy service, Epping: $180,000
- DPV Health Epping Hub - Capital funding to support the establishment of a new bulk billing GP Clinic located within the Epping Hub - $1,000,000
- Development of 51 hectares of vacant land next to Melbourne Market as a food and beverage precinct
- Upgrade freight and cold storage infrastructure to boost Melbourne Market capacity

e. Broadmeadows Revitalisation

A transformative opportunity for one of Victoria's most disadvantaged but strategically located suburbs.

Key asks:

- Fund Stage 2 of the Kangan Institute redevelopment ($300 million)
- Upgrade Broadmeadows Station and surrounding public transport infrastructure
- Expand community health, housing, and urgent care capacity by providing investment in DPV Health's Broadmeadows Medical & Community Health Centre to support the clinic's expansion and growth in services as follows:
  - Urgent Care Clinic - Operational funding to provide an Urgent Care Clinic in Broadmeadows to divert the community from acute services and address the unmet need for urgent care in the City of Hume southern catchment: Operational funding $ 2.0 million, Capital $500,000
  - $30 million capital funding to expand site footprint and parking by 50%

f. Inner North (Coburg, Brunswick, Northcote, Preston, Reservoir)

Melbourne's Inner North is a hotbed of creative industries, innovation, and small enterprise.

Key asks:

- Fully duplicate and extend the Upfield Line to Craigieburn

- Fund affordable housing and creative industries support
- Unlock employment opportunities in Brunswick & Coburg activity centres and enhance access to employment through infrastructure investment

g. Melbourne Airport Precinct

Critical to freight, tourism, and business connectivity for Victoria, Melbourne Airport is also the region's largest employer.

Key asks:

- Deliver improved public transport options, with options including extending Route 901 from Melbourne Airport to Sunbury, extending Route 902 from Airport West to Melbourne Airport via Route 478, and extending Route 406 from East Keilor to Melbourne Airport via Keilor Park Drive and South Centre Road, replicating Route 482.
- Melbourne Airport Rail (MAR) project to ensure future passenger growth can be met by multiple modes of transport, with passenger volumes expected to reach 76 million by 2042, noting recent investment in the Sunshine Super Hub to enable MAR.
- Planned projects including improved road connectivity, the Elite Park precinct, and further terminal expansion to support continued growth.
- Support for extra capacity in markets constrained by bilateral air service agreements, and Government support for new international carriers to maintain our competitive edge against other jurisdictions, noting each new daily international service means $154 million for the Victorian economy, supporting 1,380 jobs, per annum.

h. Outer North Manufacturing and Logistics Precincts

Emerging industrial hubs across Hume, Mitchell, and Whittlesea Shires.

Key asks:

- Fund Wallan Rail Electrification planning
- Progress E6 planning and Hume Freeway upgrades including vehicle interchanges as follows:
  - Hume Freeway / English Street interchange. This will be a half diamond interchange and would link up to Aitken Blvd to the west and go through to English St to the east, being the freight route towards Donnybrook Road
  - Gunns Gully Road interchange. Located over 3km north of Craigieburn North but critical for the network. This will be a full diamond interchange that would give access to Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre on the eastern side – gains access to north-south roads such as Cloverton Blvd and Dwyer St that can access Craigieburn North

- Give appropriate policy priority to Principal Freight Network hubs and corridors in planning and land use decisions
- Provide bus networks supporting employment hubs

i. Cloverton

Key asks:

- Progress Cloverton Train Station
  - **Land Acquisition** - $20,000,000 to acquire land for the future Cloverton Station, associated transport hub, and the potential realignment of the ARTC track to enable dual platforms
  - **Construction** – Appropriate funding for the construction of the Cloverton Station and associated infrastructure
- Invest in health infrastructure and land-use planning for the new Outer North Hospital:
  - **Land Acquisition -** $25,000,000 for the acquisition of 10 hectares of land for the future hospital
  - **Feasibility Study** – completion of a feasibility study to determine the future scope of the Outer North Hospital
  - **Construction** – appropriate funding for the construction of the Outer North Hospital

2. Strengthen Transport and Infrastructure Connectivity

NORTH Link and the Northern Councils Alliance have a clear integrated transport vision to unlock jobs, reduce congestion, and connect communities.

Key asks:

- Fund Wollert Rail business case and planning
- Electrify the Craigieburn to Wallan line and upgrade Wallan Station
- Duplicate and extend the Upfield Line to Craigieburn
- Expand east–west SmartBus and local bus networks
- Accelerate planning and construction of the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road and E6
- Fund the $110 million Northern Trails Network over 10 years to improve walking and cycling connections
- Progress local fast-bus networks to align with Suburban Rail Loop delivery
- Fund a feasibility study to explore expansion of the Hume Freeway
- Purchase land in Cloverton MAC for a future railway station for $20 million
- Fund the $150 million for the Camerons Lane Interchange, alongside the Australian Government's $900 million commitment
- Accelerate planning and construction of a future railway station at Beveridge

3. Invest in Health, Wellbeing, and Community Services

Melbourne's North faces growing health demand due to rapid population growth and existing service gaps.

Key asks:

- Plan and fund the new Outer North Public Hospital (site selection, service model and business case). Immediately fund the purchase of land $20M
- Provide operational and capital funding to DPV Health to assist expansion of primary care and community health services across Hume, Mitchell and Whittlesea
  - Operational funding Operational funding to maintain dental chairs at Craigieburn & Mernda Community Hospitals
    - Craigieburn Community Hospital – 5 chairs: $2,084,000 pa
    - Mernda Community Hospital – 6 chairs: $2,500,800 pa
  - Funding (operational & capital) to support the establishment of new dental chairs :
    - Kilmore: Operational $2,084,000, Capital $2,360,000
    - Beveridge: $2,084,000, Capital $2,360,000
  - New community health funding for Mitchell Shire: $1,700,000 pa
    - (Allied Health, Mental Health, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, First Nations Health)
  - Child and Family Hub Services
    - Operational funding for 4 Child & Family Hub services = $2,200,000/ annum
    - Capital funding for 2 Child & Family Hub sites = $500,000
  - Urgent Care Clinic Broadmeadows:
    - $2,000,000 in operational funding
    - $500,000 capital funding to support fit out costs DPV Health Broadmeadows Medical & Community Health Centre
  - Primary Care Services - Epping
    - Operational funding for a new women's sexual and productive health hub: $250,000
    - Operational funding for Community Health Pharmacotherapy service: $180,000
  - Expand recurrent Victims Assistance Program Funding $1,000,000 pa
  - DPV Health Craigieburn Hub (Opens July 2026)
    - Contribute 50% capital to the Craigieburn Health Hub fit out: $2,500,000
  - DPV Health Epping Hub (Opens January 2027)

        - 50% capital contribution to the DPV Health's Epping Hub GP Clinic fit out: $1,000,000
    - Deliver $25 million per year in urban greening, tree canopy and biodiversity funding
- Fund and expand mental health services in the northern growth areas to reduce pressure on overstretched services in the inner north

4. Build Skills, Education and Workforce Capability

Workforce shortages in health, construction, manufacturing, and energy are already constraining growth in Melbourne's North.

Key asks:

- Fund Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence (AMCOE) – Stage 2 (Heidelberg)
    - Melbourne Polytechnic seeks to expand and evolve the Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence at its Heidelberg campus into a nationally recognised applied innovation hub. This second stage will consolidate two critical streams of work: a physical expansion to accommodate new disciplines and equipment, and a strategic transformation to deliver product development, SME innovation support, and non-accredited modular upskilling programs
    - Proposed investment: $4- $5 million in capital, plus $450,000 to $750,000 annually in operational funding over two years, including staffing, simulator deployment, and industry-aligned curriculum development
    - Impact: Trains and upskills over 1,000 students and workers per year and supports more than 50 manufacturers annually through prototyping, applied research, and innovation services. Establishes a permanent, publicly co-invested centre for advanced manufacturing innovation in Victoria
- Fund Northern Skills, Health and Community Precinct (Cloverton)
    - Establish a new modular campus at Cloverton as the foundation of a joint education, health and community precinct between Melbourne Polytechnic and La Trobe University, co-located with the future hospital in the north corridor. The precinct will anchor at the Metropolitan Activity Centre at Cloverton and respond directly to the demographic growth, social diversity, and infrastructure expansion of Melbourne's outer north
    - Proposed capital investment: Stage 1: $5 to $10 million
    - Impact: The precinct will launch with approximately 100 learners in its first year, growing to 1,000 learners within eight years as the population matures and program offerings expand. Anchors a major public precinct in Melbourne's northern growth corridor, establishes a strategic partnership with La Trobe University and the future hospital in the north corridor, and creates a platform for long-term skills delivery in logistics, construction, allied health, and adult education
- Fund Centre for Urban Electrification (Heidelberg)

  - Establish a dedicated Centre for Urban Electrification within Building B at Melbourne Polytechnic's Heidelberg campus, expanding existing electrical training capacity into a national-priority clean energy focus area
  - The Centre will train students and tradespeople in solar PV systems, EV charging infrastructure, heat pump water systems, and building electrification technologies, directly supporting Victoria's 2035–2045 emissions targets and statewide electrification mandates
  - Proposed investment: $4–5 million, including fit-out, new industry-aligned equipment, and selective Green Star–enabling enhancements, should funding permit
  - Impact: Supports up to 300 learners annually across short courses, licensing support, and trade upskilling—addressing one of the most acute labour force gaps in Victoria's clean energy transition
- Fund Cyber Security Operations Centre - CSOC (Collingwood)
  - Melbourne Polytechnic proposes the establishment of a Cyber Security Operations Centre at its Preston campus to deliver immersive, scenario-based training aligned with national cyber workforce priorities and industry demand. The facility will incorporate a virtualised Microsoft Azure cloud environment, integrated threat simulation scenarios, Splunk SIEM tools, and a dedicated interactive platform to support hands-on learning
  - The CSOC will underpin delivery of Melbourne Polytechnic's Certificate IV in Cyber Security, Diploma of IT, and micro-credentials, while also supporting engagement with schools and industry through short courses and awareness programs
  - Proposed investment: $912,000, staged across two financial years.
  - Impact: Trains up to 300 students annually in critical cyber roles, reinforces Melbourne Polytechnic's standing within the national TAFE cyber consortium, and strengthens Victoria's capability in a high-priority, high-growth workforce sector
- Fully fund Stage 2 of the Kangan Institute Broadmeadows redevelopment ($300 million)
  - This crucial stage includes constructing a Trades and Skills Centre of Excellence and a Foundations and Pathways Centre. These state-of-the-art facilities will directly address the significant systemic disadvantage in the area by providing accessible, high-quality training aligned with workforce demands in the rapidly growing North-West region. Additionally, the completion of the masterplan will free up approximately 35,000m^2 of land, creating new opportunities to align with government priorities and drive further economic growth

5. Reduce Business Costs and Support Sustainable Industry Transition

Local businesses are navigating rising input costs, energy transition challenges, and regulatory complexity.

Key asks:

- Undertake a regulatory review to reduce compliance costs for manufacturers
- Invest in energy transition planning and support for gas-dependent industries
- Fund business advisory services and retrofit programs for low-cost energy efficiency - $2M
- Fund circular economy initiatives, investment and infrastructure in manufacturing precincts in conjunction with NORTH Link and the CSIRO - $2 million

Conclusion: Unlocking Melbourne's North

The evidence is clear: with the right investment, Melbourne's North can drive a new era of complementary and inclusive growth, innovation, sustainability and economic productivity for Victoria.

NORTH Link calls on the Victorian Government to partner with local councils, education institutions, health providers, developers and industry to bring these shovel-ready, community-backed projects to life.

This is not just investment in place. This is investment in people, in equity, and in Victoria's future.