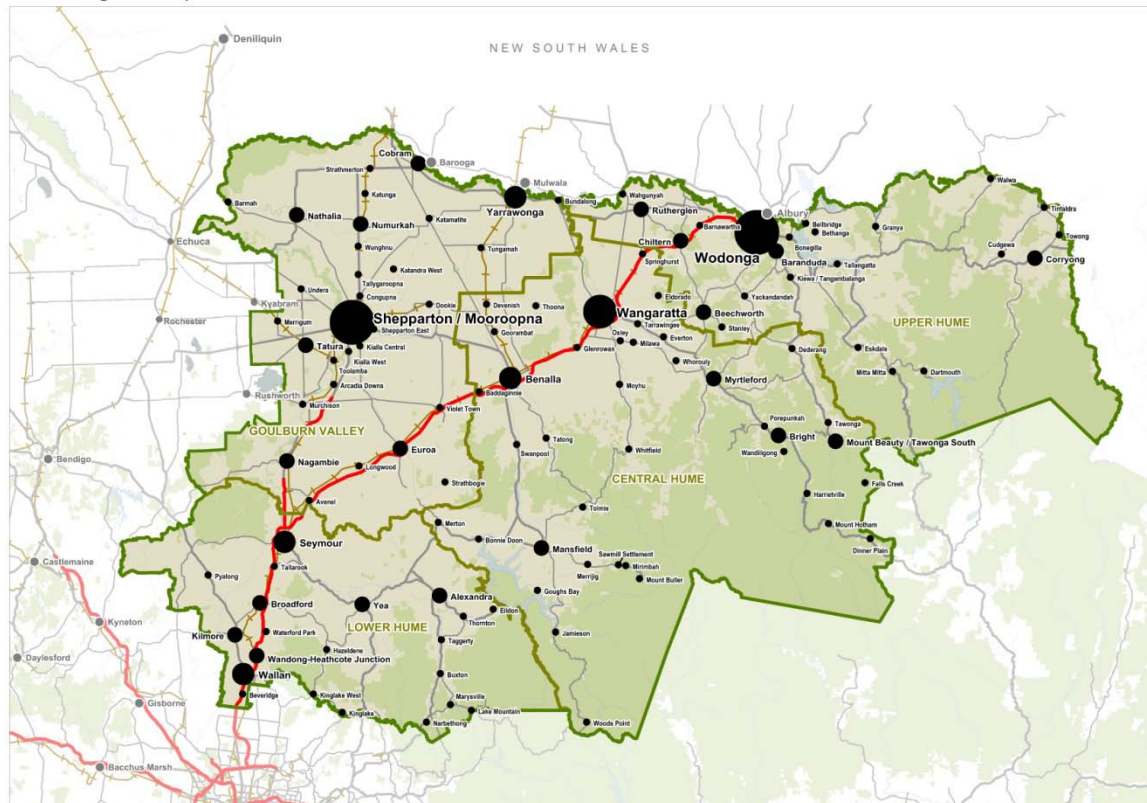


Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee

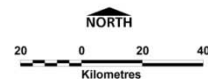
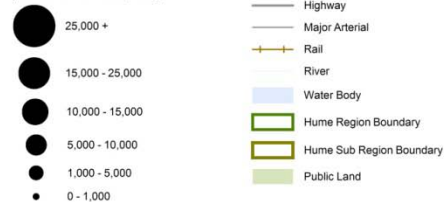
Submission from Hume Region Victoria

Snapshot of the Hume Region

Hume Region - Population



Settlement Population in Hume
(Source: Towns in Time, 2006)



Victoria Department of Planning and Community Development

© The State of Victoria, Department of Planning & Community Development, 2011. The State of Victoria does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of information in the publication and any person using or relying upon such information does so on the basis that the State of Victoria shall bear no responsibility or liability whatsoever for any errors, faults, defects or omissions in the information.

Some key points about the Hume Region are:

- The Hume Region has an estimated population of over 270,000 (ABS, 2010) and is the third largest of the five provincial regions.
- The Region has a dispersed pattern of settlements with large settlements spread across the Region supporting a network of smaller settlements.

- Less than 1% of land is zoned for urban purposes, with 56.5% zoned for rural purposes and a further 42.5% zoned public land that includes the Alpine National Park which is Victoria's largest park and includes the state's highest mountains.
- There is relatively low population density in much of the Hume Region. This has implications for accessing services and dependency on travel.
- The Region is a net exporter of goods and services with manufacturing and agriculture are key industries providing employment and economic returns to the region.
- The region has a number of high performance transport corridors along the Hume and Goulburn Valley
- Major employment sectors include agriculture, manufacturing, construction, retail trade, health care and social services
- Recognised for high value natural environment and landscapes with nationally significant biodiversity and water.

Issues

Issue 1

The digital divide between metropolitan, regional cities and rural areas is great. Some areas within the Hume Region have very little or no mobile coverage with mobile black spots scattered throughout the Region.

Impact

This creates an impediment to:

- attracting new industry
- attracting new residents
- being responsive during times of emergency i.e. bushfires
- effectively using time when travelling to communicate.

Opportunities

Exploring ideas to provide better support to rural areas in order to allow them to participate in the digital economy will deliver positive benefits for Australian families and communities in the form of improved access to business and job opportunities, health, education and government services.

Prioritising improvement of black spots along key travel routes i.e. highways, public transport routes.

Issue 2

Businesses with sophisticated technology utilise services that they access remotely to support problem solving. Small businesses/companies are becoming more reliant on the internet for buying and selling goods and services, management of business operations. Some rural/regional areas have slow and unreliable/intermittent satellite service for accessing the internet. Some areas are still using dial up technology i.e. within Strathbogie Shire.

Impact

Rural areas are unable to be as competitive as metropolitan/regional areas as they are unable to access fast and reliable internet services. There is a growing level of dependency within industry and other sectors on accessing fast and reliable internet services. Rising fuel costs and impacts on transport and supply chains is continuing to increase demand for digital technology. Reduced water availability will increase demand for technology to support innovative approaches to water management for the agriculture sector.

Opportunities

Better access to wireless/improved satellite and eventually broadband technology in order for businesses in Hume Region to participate in a global marketplace. Greater use of online opportunities will help the efficiency of existing business processes and maximise overall competitiveness, assist to grow revenues and increase productivity.

Issue 3

There are gaps in infrastructure to support connectivity and capacity to connect to NBN infrastructure within the Region. It is also unclear in some locations who owns and operates towers. Within areas of Hume Region it is more important to some users that there is coverage rather than how fast access is occurring.

Impact

Lack of infrastructure has an impact on both business and capacity to socially connect. Due to lack of knowledge around ownership there is poor access to infrastructure during emergencies such as bushfire as it can be unclear who has right of access or who to contact to gain access.

Telecommunications infrastructure must be able to service anticipated growth in demand for telecommuting and home based businesses. Experience in other growth regions has identified that approximately 15-20% of new home developments will seek to telecommute or undertake home based business activities.

Opportunities

There is opportunity to increase coverage and capacity by:

- conducting an audit of all existing towers to establish ownership/control and developing arrangements to support improving access to towers/other relevant infrastructure
- Identifying opportunities to share/ease requirements.

Issue 4

By 2031 it has been forecast that there will be an additional projected 100,000 residents within the Region with a significant increase in the number aged 55+ by 2026. The region must be able to service both existing and anticipated demand.

The Hume Region has:

- Some of the lowest levels of education attainment in regional Victoria
- Some of the highest rates of homelessness
- Pockets of relative high disadvantage within settlements and rural areas
- Significant numbers of young people moving from the area seeking education, employment and entertainment opportunities elsewhere.

Those that are currently disadvantaged have greater levels of disadvantage when unable to access digital technology to support their participation/ access to services/education.

Impact

Disadvantaged groups cannot take advantage of timesaving activities such as:

- online shopping
- remote work and study opportunities
- gathering information
- accessing services including professional
- gaining education and knowledge
- accessing social networking, media and entertainment
- substituting physical services for electronically delivered services
- being able to engage online communities.

Opportunities

The potential opportunities include:

- greater focus on improving social inclusion through digital technology
- improving digital access to education, knowledge and information
- Having facilities that encourage young people to remain in the region/older persons to better participate

Issue 5

Workforce sustainability is an issue for the Region especially in attracting resources to support economic development/service delivery throughout the region.

Impact

Without capacity to access a workforce businesses within Hume Region will not be able to remain competitive, grow revenues or increase productivity.

Opportunities

Telecommuting/teleworking is an option to attract skilled workforce to rural areas when not feasible or unable to accommodate them in person.

***Hume Regional Development Australia
Committee***

***Hume Economic Development
Network***

November 2011