



GREATER
SHEPPARTON

Submission to the Regional Telecommunications
Independent Review Committee

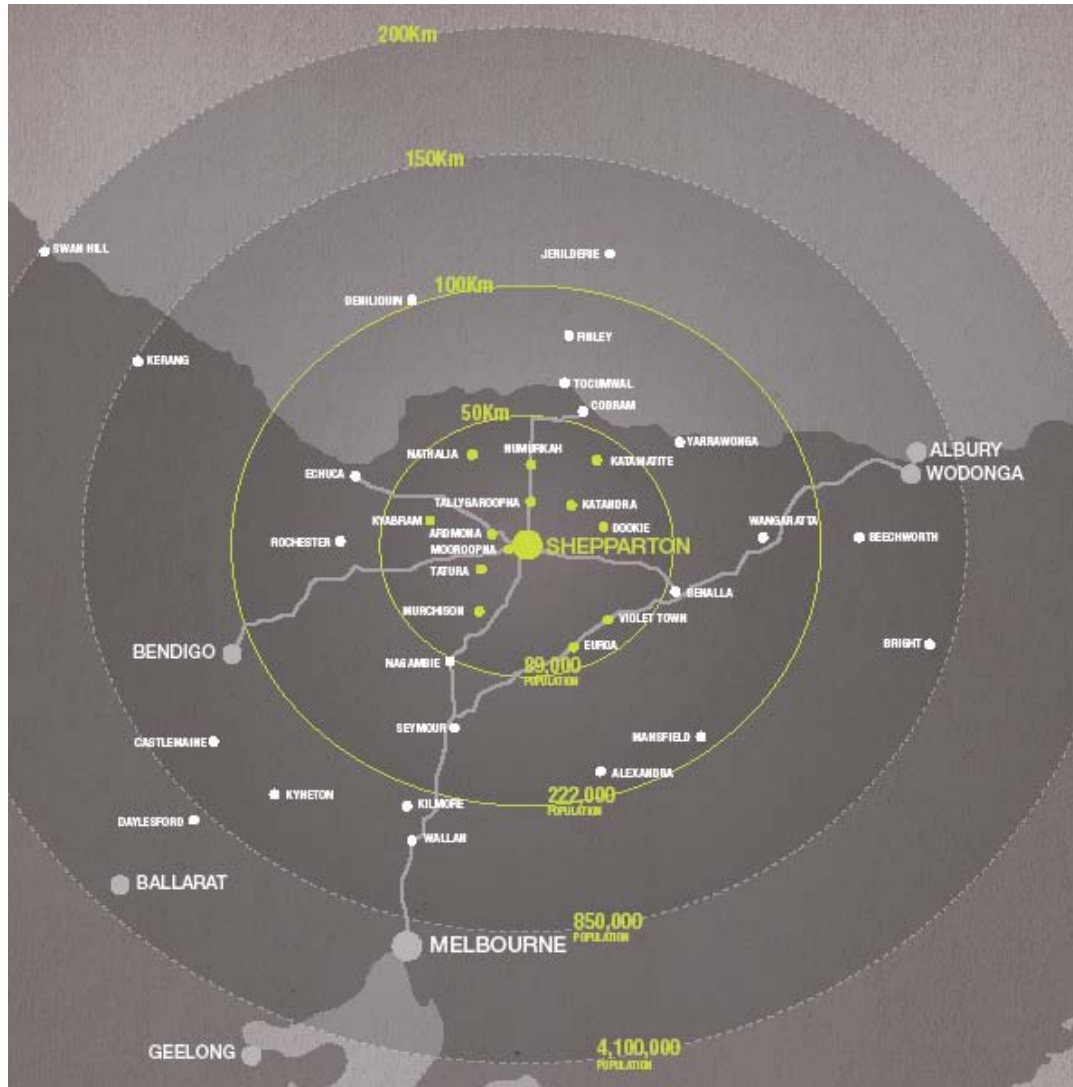
Greater Shepparton City Council

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Greater Shepparton City Council Catchment



Greater Shepparton is the heart of the most significant irrigation district in Australia, often referred to as the 'Food Bowl of Australia', with a working population of 25,000, employing municipal residents and residents from neighbouring municipalities.

Employment in the municipality is dominated by manufacturing (13.5%) and agriculture (10%), with irrigated agriculture supporting a major food processing sector that includes major Australian and multi-national brands such as SPC Ardmona, Campbell's Soups and Tatura Milk. These food processing industries jointly produce an annual gross value of \$3.3 billion, with a flow-on effect to other sectors of the regional economy having an annual value of approximately \$7.5 billion.

Manufacturing representation in the Goulburn Valley



Welcoming the NBN

The Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee. The GSCC has identified the NBN as a key economic enabler and a critical component to the ongoing growth and economic prosperity of the region. Leveraging opportunities provided by the NBN are to be included in the overall investment attraction strategy within the Economic Development Plan of the GSCC.

Digital Economy

The GSCC is currently in discussions with neighbouring Councils to establish a digital hub which will encourage the efficient use of shared resources across four municipalities. A Memorandum of Understanding is currently being drafted with the Strathbogie Shire supporting this initiative that, without the NBN, could potentially be cost prohibitive.

With such a strong manufacturing base, markets are very much of a global nature with export being a part of the core business of a number of local companies. The timely rollout of the NBN **to this region** will ensure we remain globally competitive, a position that has already been under threat due to drought conditions, the uncertainty around water security, and the escalation of the Australian dollar. The NBN will provide the technological advantages that are already being realised by international competitors.

Small Business case study:

Ian Almond is the proprietor of Will Print Shepparton, a small to medium size enterprise that operates in the print industry. Ian has the NBN very much on his radar and sees the NBN as critical to the ongoing growth of his business.

“We are extremely keen to get the NBN here as it will open up so many doors for us in terms of growth potential and efficiencies. Our business often relies on very large digital files that can take excessive amounts of time to transfer. This impacts on our delivery timelines and our ability to meet client expectations.”

“We are currently developing a fully functional web based online design service which is a key platform for our growth. However it is highly reliant on the speed and functionality that will be delivered by the NBN. Our market is no longer just local – it is national and we need the NBN if we want to look international.”

Agriculture

Farmers within the region are regarded as professional business people, understanding the need to monitor their produce, irrigation systems, water levies, weather conditions, cattle movements, fences, etc. It is recognised that there is an immediate need for infrastructure that can handle the capacity needed implement *smart-farm* technology.

The recent release of the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan places greater emphasis on the requirement of the agricultural industry to realise further water efficiencies. This will need to be achieved through new efficiencies including the use and monitoring of water and the ongoing upgrading of infrastructure. The NBN will be critical to the region, to support the smarter use of water, and to promote the innovations that will be required to realise the demanded savings.

Healthcare

Healthcare organisations understand the importance of innovation, security and privacy, acknowledging the need to support a robust infrastructure.

Shepparton is home to Goulburn Valley Health, a 280 bed acute and extended care facility which provides surgical, medical, paediatric, obstetrics and gynaecology, intensive care and psychiatry services as well as extended care and regional services.

GV Health works in partnership with other health providers within the region to ensure that the right mix of services are provided to meet community needs.

As a provider of critical health services to the Goulburn Valley, their capability to bring current day health related services to regional Victoria will be dependent on the high speed data connections that only the NBN can provide. The recent 'Tele-stroke' trial in Wangaratta where the NBN has allowed the early diagnosis of stroke is an excellent example of how bringing NBN technology to regional Victoria will save lives.

Social Inclusion

Given the multicultural nature of our local community, it is expected that there will be a high demand for NBN services as communities seek to remain engaged both locally and with their places of origin.

The Greater Shepparton region is renowned for our cultural diversity and the welcome we extend to new arrivals. Currently 11 per cent of the population were born overseas and up to 50 different languages are spoken. Being a region that is conducive to the placement of asylum seekers, the cultural diversity of our region is set to increase.

The 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics census shows the dominant non-English speaking country of birth in the City of Greater Shepparton as Italy, where 1.9 per cent of the population, or 1,081 people, were born.

High populations also originate from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Italy, Greece, Albania, Turkey, India, Afghani, Iraqi, Sudanese and Congolese.

Greater Shepparton remains an attractive place to a wide range of migrants for a variety of reasons. These include our history of migration and reputation of welcoming new arrivals and social factors such as family or community members already living in the region. Greater Shepparton City Council is committed to continuing to promote the diversity of our region, while strengthening the sustainability and culture of communities which have arrived in the region.

Education

Tertiary Education participation rates in this region are the lowest in Victoria and it is widely recognised that in order for this region to prosper, these low participation rates need to be addressed and significantly improved.

Access to the NBN needs to be an integral component in any strategy to turn around this emerging trend. Specifically, creating more options for people to access education will encourage higher participation. Examples of increased access include:

- Access to learning materials
- Equal educational opportunities for students regardless of where they live
- Access to 'virtual classrooms', including real time collaboration with classmates and teachers
- The opportunity to take part in practical classes through simulations and online demonstrations

Business Efficiencies and Competitiveness

There are still a number of areas within the immediate area of Greater Shepparton that are considered black spots in terms of telecommunications. This significantly impacts the capability of a number of businesses who have been waiting for an infrastructure upgrade for some time now.

Black spots are very much spasmodic in the immediate area of Shepparton. The Council's own depot (located less than 4km away from the CBD) experience constant mobile drop-outs due to lack of coverage. There is further anecdotal evidence of black spots existing in the outlying areas of Dookie, Murchison and Undera.

These black spots also occur between Shepparton and Melbourne, particularly along the railway passage which impacts travellers looking to maximise travel time. Business travellers remain frustrated with significant drop-out rates with no guarantee of consistent connections.

In terms of internet connection availability, significant anomalies exist. By way of example there are areas within the municipality that have access to ADSL2, however walk across the street and you are limited to ADSL, creating frustration among both commercial and residential users.

With the potential cost impact of the recently passed *carbon tax*, it is reasonable to expect businesses will be looking to the NBN to help minimise any additional costs that could be incurred as a result of the tax. Businesses will look to make savings, though the greater utilisation of video conferencing facilities (eliminating travel time to Melbourne), and other technological advances that will contribute to a reduced carbon footprint. With such a strong manufacturing presence in the region, minimising the impact of the *carbon tax* is critical in order to remain globally competitive.

Due to Greater Shepparton having access to an infrastructure owned only by Telstra, the ability of Internet Service Providers (ISP's) to offer competitive commercial packages to business is somewhat restricted. Already, some local ISP's have indicated that it is better for them to focus on areas where there is multiple ownership of telecommunications infrastructure. Regional Centres such as Bendigo and Ballarat have an existing infrastructure that offers this, allowing ISP's to enter a competitive market. This lack of alternate infrastructure in Greater Shepparton limits the choice of new and emerging businesses placing us at a significant disadvantage, particularly in terms of new investment attraction. This position will not change until the NBN is rolled out in the Greater Shepparton region.