Summary

This draft strategy proposes a sustainable direction for a beautiful, historic, lively and prosperous part of Victoria.

It is a 20-year land use and transport plan for managing growth and change across the Great Ocean Road Region, which extends from Torquay in the east to Warrnambool in the west, and north to the Princes Highway.

The plan looks beyond immediate growth demands and sets a vision for the region that is based on economically, environmentally and socially sustainable development.

It aims to preserve and enhance the region's natural and built environment, to facilitate development of its prosperous economy, and to maintain it as a prime visitor destination with world-class standing.

To achieve this vision, it focuses on four directions built around the key issues of the environment, settlement, access and prosperity.

Policies and initiatives have been built around these directions to make up a framework for long-term action. Implementation of the initiatives will involve government, local councils, industry, and the community in working together to guide the region's future development. Some initiatives are government commitments while the implementation of others will depend on availability of government funding.

The draft strategy focuses on broad regional issues such as development in towns, visitor management in parks, transport infrastructure, land-use planning and incursions into natural areas. It outlines how we will protect important areas of landscape and seascape, safeguard natural resources, facilitate sustainable development, direct growth to specific towns along the coast and inland, and preserve the character of smaller towns.

Directions

The draft strategy is built around four directions. These are based on a framework of sustainability:

Direction 1. Environment

Protect the landscape and care for the environment

Strengthen protection for public land and parks (Policy 1.1).

Protect significant landscapes (Policy 1.2).

Ensure effective protection of catchments and coastal areas (Policy 1.3).

Promote the region's environmental and cultural values (Policy 1.4).

Direction 2. Settlement

Manage the growth of towns

Direct urban growth to townships where it can best be accommodated (Policy 2.1).

Protect the character of coastal towns and promote best practice design for new development (Policy 2.2).

Protect the open areas between towns (Policy 2.3).

Encourage sustainability as the region grows (Policy 2.4).

Direction 3. Access

Improve management of access and transport

Enhance the Great Ocean Road as a world-class travelling experience (Policy 3.1).

Develop and promote inland routes (Policy 3.2).

Improve road safety and emergency management planning (Policy 3.3).

Provide more travel choices to and within the region (Policy 3.4).

Direction 4. Prosperity

Encourage sustainable tourism and resource use

Develop more sustainable tourism (Policy 4.1).

Promote the whole region as a premier recreation and visitor destination (Policy 4.2).

Encourage longer stays and greater satisfaction for visitors (Policy 4.3).

Direct significant tourism facilities to key towns and strategic locations (Policy 4.4).

Support land use and transport needs of key regional industries (Policy 4.5).

Use natural resources with care (Policy 4.6).

How will it be implemented?

Establish a single national park

Establish a single national park that extends from Anglesea to Cape Otway (Initiative 1.1.1).

Provide a world-class travelling experience

Establish a new management direction for the Great Ocean Road, as well as new road safety initiatives and better travel and interpretive information (Initiatives 3.1.2, 3.1.3–3.2.3, 3.3.1).

Improve access within the region

Develop and promote safe and functional travel routes through the hinterland, and transport options such as better bus services and a comprehensive network of walking and cycling paths (Initiatives 3.2.1, 3.2.4, 3.3.2, 3.4.1–3.4.8).

Protect significant landscapes

Define significant landscapes along the coast and in the hinterland and give added protection through specialised assessment and improved utilisation of the planning system (Initiatives 1.2.1–1.2.2).

Protect coastal towns

Implement stronger planning controls to protect the unique character of coastal towns, and facilitate sustainable development (Initiatives 2.2.1–2.2.3, 2.3.1–2.3.4).

Become a leader in sustainable new development

Promote the region's emphasis on sustainable development and demonstrate best practice design (Initiatives 2.4.1–2.4.3, 4.3.1).

Spread growth across the region

Direct coastal growth to Torquay and Warrnambool with limited growth for Apollo Bay, and encourage growth in the inland towns of Colac, Timboon and Camperdown (Initiatives 2.1.1–2.1.7).

Manage seasonal peaks

Develop a model process for better managing seasonal peaks and events in the region (Initiative 4.2.7), spread tourism across the region (Initiatives 4.2.1–4.2.7, 4.3.1) and promote inland access (Initiatives 3.2.1–3.2.4).

Ensure effective planning decisions

Encourage the use of the strategy to guide local decision making (Initiatives 2.3.1–2.3.4).

Create a network of tourism opportunities

Facilitate, and locate high-quality tourism in strategic locations to encourage visitors to explore the whole region (Initiatives 4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.3.1, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3).

Focus on the region

What is the Great Ocean Road Region?

This strategy defines the Great Ocean Road Region as 6,000 square kilometres of south-western Victoria, stretching from Torquay in the east to Warrnambool in the west, and northward to the important road traffic artery of the Princes Highway. Its southern boundary is defined by the coast and the Great Ocean Road.

Culturally, and in terms of economic development, including tourism, the region has important links and interactions with the cities of Geelong and Melbourne.

It also has strong connections with adjoining areas north of the Princes Highway (including the Grampians) and west of Warrnambool to Portland and communities along the South Australian border.

It covers five local government areas – Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Moyne, Surf Coast and Warrnambool, with a population of around 100,000 people. In coastal areas, this is seasonally increased by a significant number of people who own or rent holiday homes, or use caravan parks.
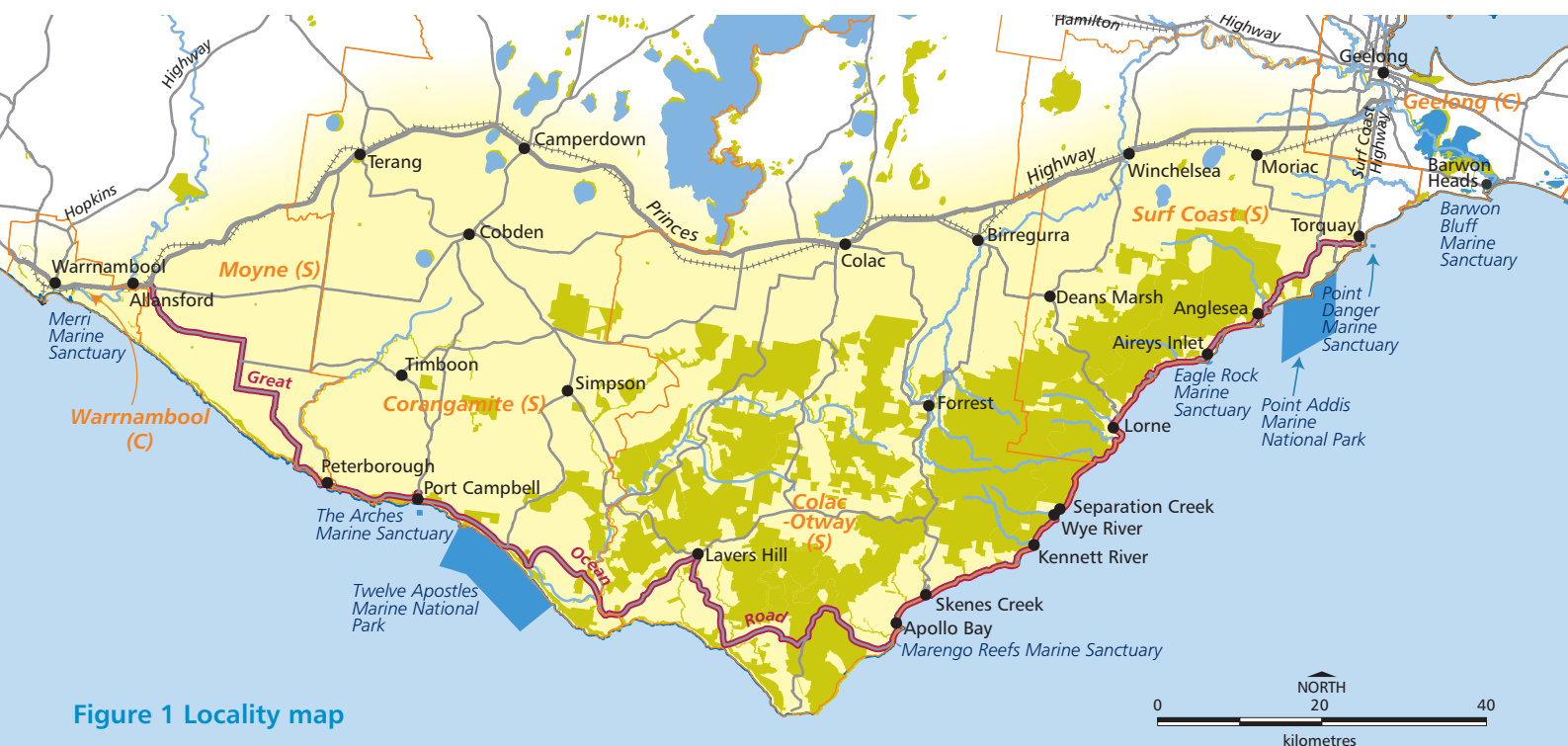
Figure 1 Locality map

Legend			
Great Ocean Road	Rail	LGA boundaries	Lakes and rivers
Roads	Public land	Study area	Marine parks and sanctuaries

Past history

Aboriginal tribes were the original inhabitants of the region. They camped beside the volcanic crater lakes near Camperdown and hunted along the river valleys, feasting on the beach, building up middens of shells and bones that can still be seen today. The first white settlers established huge pastoral empires on the fertile grasslands in the 1830s.

Access to the region's coastal settlements had to be by sea. Small settlements such as Apollo Bay and Lorne sprang up to handle the tall timber dragged from the Otways and shipped out to help build the new State of Victoria. Shipwrecks littered the coast; despite lighthouses at Cape Otway and Aireys Inlet, ships were still going aground in the 1930s.

The first subdivision at Lorne, then called Louttit Bay, took place in 1869. Much of the open land in the region, except the southernmost tip now occupied by the Otway National Park, was opened to selection in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Where the selections were forested, the settlers had to clear them.

Dairy farming developed around Apollo Bay from the 1880s and became a major industry for the region in the twentieth century. Colac, reached by rail in 1877, emerged as an important inland centre. A narrow-gauge train line opened much of the Beech Forest area to productive farming and made the timber industry more viable.

A 78,100 hectare area of state forest was established in the Otways as early as 1873, but was withdrawn in 1879 as the land boom began. In 1899, 64,000 hectares were again reserved, paving the way for today's proposed newly expanded Otway National Park. The dramatic coastline is protected by a 30-metre foreshore reserve established in the late 1870s.

The coastal towns remained physically isolated well into the new century even though plans for an ocean road had first been made in the 1880s. In 1916, it was suggested that soldiers returned from the First World War could be employed to build a road that would create a tourist route of world renown, serve as a permanent memorial to Australia's war dead, and link the coastal towns.

The road's statewide historic significance was confirmed in 1997 by the Land Conservation Council. A number of significant sites were identified, including the Memorial Arch (Eastern View) and the Grassy Creek site of the construction camp and first tollgate, as well as natural features named by the soldier-workers, such as Artillery Rocks and Shrapnel Gully.

In succeeding decades, the road has developed from a picturesque local access route to a construction of statewide historic significance, and a destination of such renown, in Australia and around the world that, in 2002, Condé Naste's Traveller magazine described a trip along the Great Ocean Road as 'the journey of a lifetime' and 'one of the world's most inspirational trips, which should appear on every traveller's wish list'.

Construction started in 1919. Despite massive engineering difficulties, this continued until 1932 with picks and shovels, horses and drays and explosives. Three thousand ex-servicemen were employed, as well as jobless workers during the Depression years.

At first, the full route was a tollway, with separate charges for drivers and passengers. The toll was abolished in 1936 when the Great Ocean Road Trust, formed to build the road, handed it over to the State Government.

Present situation

The Great Ocean Road Region is a visitor drawcard, a nature-lover's paradise and a prosperous part of Victoria. It is of considerable environmental, economic, social and cultural significance to the state. Its extraordinary natural beauty and environmental value are internationally and nationally recognised.

Its primary industries are dominated by dairying, timber, livestock and fishing. Both the dairy and timber industries are forecast to double in the next 20 years.

There is growing potential for energy production based on offshore gas, geothermal energy and renewable wind power.

Outside Melbourne, the Great Ocean Road is Victoria's most popular tourist destination, attracting between 12 and 14 per cent of all domestic and international visitors within the state. There is huge potential for further development of the tourist market, along the coast and also inland, and for growth across the region. Coastal communities in particular are expanding rapidly, with increasing numbers of permanent and holiday residents.

'The combination of spectacular coastal rural and agricultural land, natural forests, woodland and heath environments makes up a special region of the world.'

(comment from the Melbourne community forum)

The basis for the strategy

The government's vision for Victoria

The government's Growing Victoria Together policy, released in 2002, expresses the government's broad vision for the future.

The policy links the issues important to Victorians, the priority actions that the government needs to take next and the measures the government will use to show progress. It is the basis for involving all Victorians in the ongoing challenge – working together to build and deliver a fair, sustainable and prosperous future.

Growing Victoria Together identifies the promotion of sustainable development and the protection of the environment for future generations as key strategic issues that require priority action. The Great Ocean Road Region Strategy reflects this focus. It builds on the principles of Melbourne 2030, the government's land use and transport plan for Melbourne and its surrounding regions, by providing a strategy to promote sustainable development and protect the environment of the Great Ocean Road Region.

Why do we need to look ahead?

The Great Ocean Road Region needs a long-term strategy that manages and integrates development and provides the necessary level of supporting infrastructure.
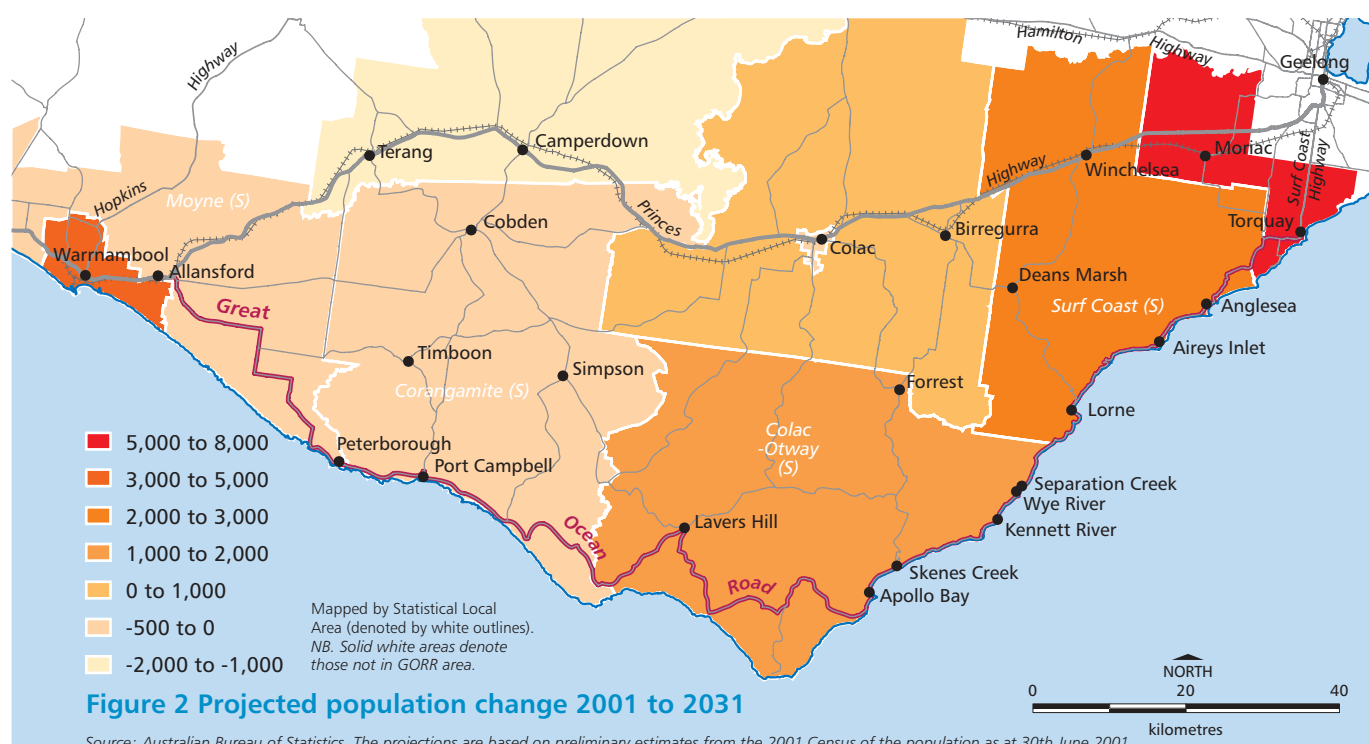
Not managing growth will result in:

- environmental damage
- reduced visitor satisfaction
- potential loss of natural assets
- growth in some towns and communities that cannot be sustained
- loss of township character, with inappropriate development

- growing congestion on the Great Ocean Road and a further reduction in road safety
- reduced quality of life in many towns and communities
- increased fire risk and the need for emergency management.

However, if we plan for growth, we can meet the immediate demands and to set a vision for the region over the next 20 years.

The Great Ocean Road Region Strategy is based on development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. It focuses on broad regional issues such as development in towns, land-use planning, transport infrastructure, visitor management and protection of the natural environment.

Legend:
- 5,000 to 8,000
- 3,000 to 5,000
- 2,000 to 3,000
- 1,000 to 2,000
- 0 to 1,000
- -500 to 0
- -2,000 to -1,000

Mapped by Statistical Local Area (denoted by white outlines). NB. Solid white areas denote those not in GORR area.

Figure 2 Projected population change 2001 to 2031

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. The projections are based on preliminary estimates from the 2001 Census of the population as at 30th June 2001.

What are the main issues and challenges?

The changes accompanying land use and transport in the Great Ocean Road Region are both positive and negative. They centre around the challenges of:

- increased visitor numbers
- rapid urban development in coastal towns
- road traffic
- economic growth
- emergency management.

Visitor numbers are growing, while more and more holidaymakers and investors are turning to the Great Ocean Road Region to rent or buy holiday houses. Visitor growth will need to be managed in response to infrastructure and servicing requirements along the coast and in the hinterland, and to the region's capacity to absorb such growth. Seasonal population peaks are boosted by people using holiday homes and caravan parks.

Holiday home ownership along the coast between Torquay and Apollo Bay is high; currently between 50 and 66 per cent of all houses in Anglesea, Lorne and Apollo Bay are not permanently occupied. This creates a highly mobile population that contributes to the pressure on services within the region, mainly during summer.

Residential growth and strong visitor growth have led to rapid urban development in coastal towns, the expansion of built-up areas and pressures between towns. There is growing concern about the type and scale of development and its impact on the landscape, appearance and character of towns in the region. The impact of development on catchments is a specific concern, particularly from waste water systems in unsewered areas, as is the increased demand for services. For instance, there is pressure on water and sewerage systems, particularly for communities at the eastern end of the Great Ocean Road, Apollo Bay and the western end at Peterborough and Allansford.