

## Room for a View Oct 1, 2010

People of Ballarat get ready. Our town is about to become the major inland city in Australia. A bold claim perhaps, but as other regional towns struggle to emerge from the effects of the GFC, Ballarat has hit the ground running. Despite some job losses, our economy is in better shape than other towns our size and our proximity to Melbourne and Geelong – two other great centres of growth in Victoria, means we are ideally placed to capitalise on public investment in infrastructure as well as private investment in a range of industries and services.

The study released by AECOM last week has confirmed what we at the Committee for Ballarat have been saying for some time, and that is, a dedicated employment zone built around the airport precinct, serviced by a road that links the Midland highway to the Western freeway will secure Ballarat's economic prosperity for the foreseeable future. In the short term, the creation of an estimated 3,900 **direct** new jobs and many more associated indirect jobs goes a long way to achieving the target of 10,000 jobs in 10 years set by the Committee. But they are just the start. One only has to observe the rapid uptake of land and subsequent economic development that has occurred directly adjacent to the Deer Park bypass on the western fringe of Melbourne to see what is possible. The Geelong bypass and Armstrong Creek development is another shining example of what can be achieved by linking roads to economic development zones.

If I was charged with making investment decisions either in the public or private sphere, I would be hard-pressed to find a safer bet than putting money into the Ballarat West Employment Zone and associated infrastructure. The Committee for Ballarat and the City of Ballarat have been speaking with one voice on this topic for quite some time and it seems that the message is getting through to government at the State and Federal levels. We are hopeful that announcements to support this project in terms of building the road and transferring ownership of the land will be made shortly. We are also hopeful that the State opposition's \$1 billion regional infrastructure fund will target the Ballarat West Employment Zone and announce it as an election promise prior to November.

The agenda for Ballarat around future prosperity and community well-being has been laid out by the City of Ballarat and supported strongly by the Committee for Ballarat, and is now coming to fruition. The

recently launched CBD Strategy is an important part of that agenda as is the continuing development in tertiary education and training. Our water reserves are secure for the immediate to medium term with plans ready to be implemented for further storm-water harvesting should the need arise. Our hospitals and health services are expanding to meet the needs of not just Ballarat but surrounding areas. The final and most important part of the picture is a thriving Ballarat West Employment Zone and associated road link. A commitment by government to make this happen quickly will mean that we can loudly proclaim that Ballarat is truly open for business (and pleasure) and is able to accommodate a rapidly growing population seeking employment.

Tony Chew – Chair Committee for Ballarat