

Room For A View

By Glen Walker

Australia has more to offer the world than to be its favoured tourist destination or quarry.

Equally true is that Ballarat has more to offer Victoria than to act as a commuter city for Melbourne.

While the road and rail links to Melbourne, coupled with relative housing affordability, create real opportunities for Ballarat in this area, we should not look here alone for ways to advance our region.

How can Ballarat leverage its cultural and architectural assets; its hospitals, schools, sporting facilities and overall amenity, to create growth to make us the envy of Australia?

In this "Room for a View" I would like to pose the following question - Would connecting Ballarat's transport links create a new Gold Rush?

Most major cities are built on a harbour. Those with bigger, deeper and safer harbours grew faster. This was due to trade associated with sea freight. Over time these cities became the landing point for freight to be distributed throughout the immediate regions. This occurred first by navigable rivers, then by road, rail and finally by air.

Development occurred wherever transport routes crossed. In Australia's case, the Murray Darling river system and the paddle steamers that serviced it opened up vast tracts of farmland. Wherever a road crossed a river, up sprouted a town. Albury/Wodonga is one example; in fact, the Australian landscape is littered with towns that have grown where major transport routes intersect.

In Ballarat's case, the Gold Rush brought people here. The transport links to facilitate the associated trade followed. The Glenelg, Midland, Sunraysia and of course, the second busiest transport route in Australia, the Western Highway, serviced Ballarat's growth needs. A look at a map of the western districts of Victoria shows that all roads do, in fact, lead to Ballarat!

In recent times the growth created by the opening up of a region to transport and trade can be seen every time we drive to Melbourne. The Bolte Bridge, Westgate Bridge and Western Ring Road connected the busiest port in Australia (Port of Melbourne) with the busiest freight link (The Hume Highway) with the second busiest freight link (the Western Highway) and the second busiest airport (Tullamarine). In the middle of this interconnectedness lay Laverton with its abundant flat and, at that stage, cheap land. The development in the Laverton region over the last 10 - 15 years is nothing short of staggering.

What would happen to Ballarat if we connected the Midland, Glenelg, Sunraysia and Western Highways with the rail line and the airport? Would this encourage trade? Would

we be able to better capitalize on the Deer Park Bypass (and Anthony's Cutting upgrade) and the improved access to Melbourne and the newly deepened port?

Eighteen months ago, the Committee for Ballarat identified the "Ballarat Western Growth Zone" as the second most important challenge facing Ballarat, behind water. The Ballarat Western Growth Zone or BWGZ is based around linking the various transport corridors in and around Ballarat, solving congestion and managing the growth opportunities.

A look into the crystal ball sees an arterial road (or ring road) starting at the Midland Highway south of Sebastopol which skirts the Western fringe of Ballarat and links the Midland with the Glenelg, Sunraysia and Western Highways as shown in the accompanying map. This then opens up all major transport routes and connects them with the airport and future rail services.

Acting for the City of Ballarat and VicRoads, Ratio Consultants advised on the best available selection of routes in October 2007. More recently another highly regarded road industry consultant, (Maunsell) AECOM, acting for the City of Ballarat, recommended the preferred alignment.

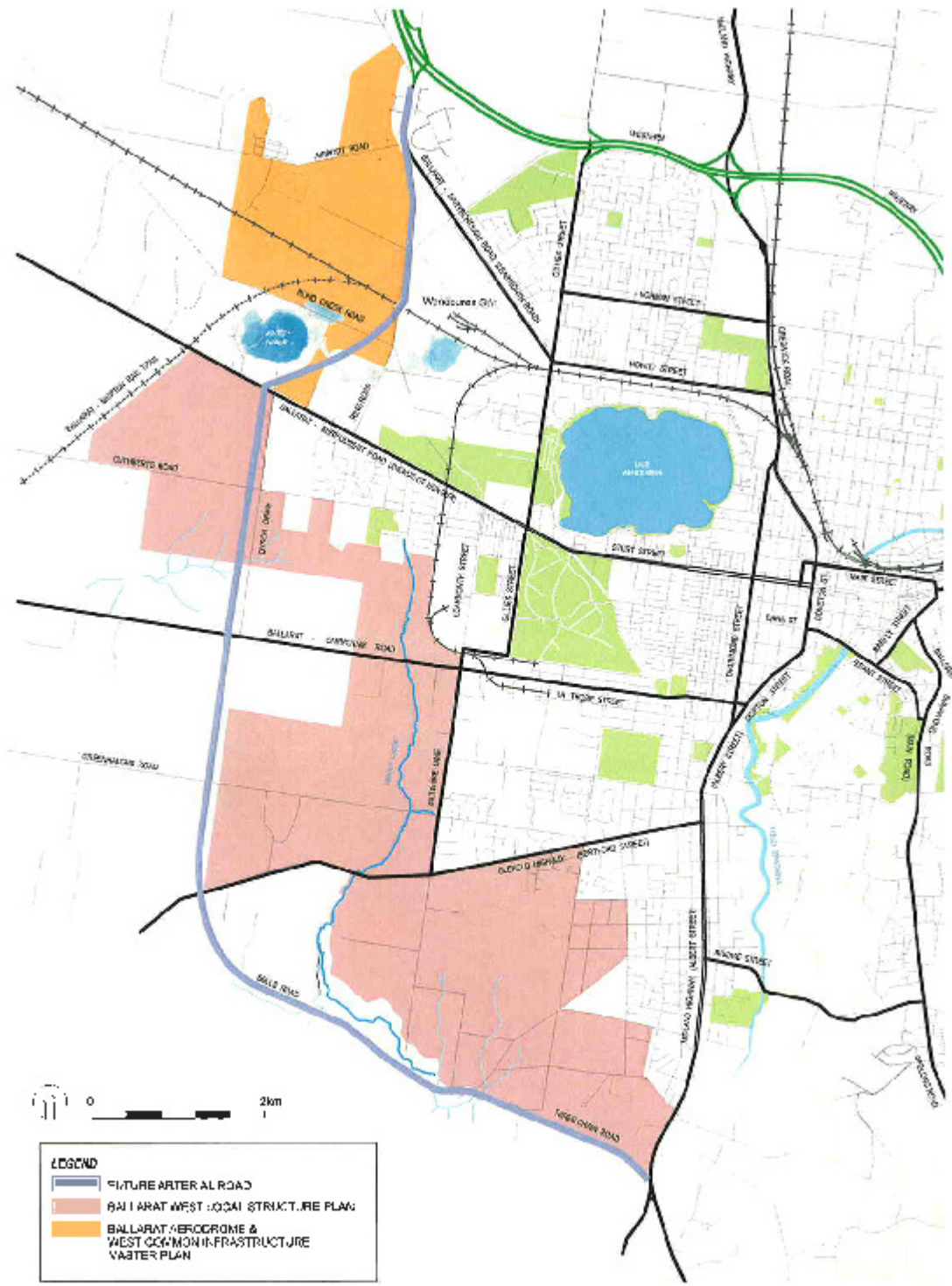
The three connected modes of transport (rail, road and air), coupled with the readily available flat land in the vicinity, will encourage development in housing, industry, warehousing and retail.

Companies move from the heavily taxed and congested confines of Melbourne, encouraged by a marketing program focusing on the lifestyle advantages of Ballarat and a variety of targeted Government incentives. Billions of dollars of investment occurs. Tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs are created. Thousands either migrate to Ballarat and or commute from the western growth regions of Melbourne.

Kevin Sheedy recently came to town advocating the construction of a boutique AFL stadium. "Build it and they will come" he was quoted as saying.

Would connecting Ballarat's transport links create a new Gold Rush?

Glen Walker is Chair of the Ballarat Western Growth Zone Task Team of the Committee for Ballarat. He is also General Manager - Manufacturing for the Maxi-CUBE, Freighter and Peki divisions of MaxiTRANS



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