

**Western Melbourne Tourism Inc AGM
Chair's Report
29 November 2018**

It's with pleasure I report on another year of activities, challenges, success and growth for Western Melbourne Tourism.

I enjoy reporting at the AGM, because it's an opportunity to reflect on the year; to consider what's been achieved, acknowledge the challenges, and celebrate progress.

But this report is more than just a list projects we've been working on. It also provides the opportunity to check in on our Strategic Plan; to remind ourselves of what we're working towards and our purpose as an organisation.

We believe in what the west offers visitors

We work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy of Melbourne's west

And why do we do it?

Because the visitor economy is directly linked to local jobs and to the prosperity and livability of our region.

The developments in the region over the last 12 months have been significant and none the least being the announcement of Avalon as Melbourne's second international airport (launching next week) and the commitment of the State Government to the Melbourne Airport Rail link route to hub at Sunshine.

Destination Management Visitor Plan

From the Board's perspective a major achievement this year was the completion of the Destination Management Visitor Plan for Greater Melbourne, and the development of the Destination Management Plan for Melbourne's West.

We worked with Destination Melbourne, the Victorian State Government, many other Councils across Melbourne and local stakeholders in a highly collaborative process.

We'll be launching our plan at the stakeholder briefing later this afternoon we look forward to expanding the detail; but in this forum I want to note a couple of points.

The work on the Greater Melbourne Plan was the first of its kind for the whole of Melbourne. It was an enormous undertaking involving hundreds of hours of work, extensive consultation and the delivery of new primary research.

Though our Executive Officer Richard Ponsford, Melbourne's West was well represented on the steering committee for the overall project, working with Destination Melbourne, State Government, and councils across Melbourne.

The development of the regional plan for Melbourne's West is an important step as we continue to build a prosperous visitor economy for our region.

And the opportunities in the next 10 years are exciting;

- to expand the tourism focus beyond the boundaries of the CBD;
- to emphasise the authentic experiences available in Melbourne's West;
- to encourage visitor dispersal from the CBD;
- and to entice visitors to stay longer and spend more in our region.
- ultimately we want more visitors choosing Melbourne's West as a destination in its own right.

There are a long list of recommendations and a plethora of ideas, but to drive action, the board has identified areas of immediate priority and advocacy around

- infrastructure,
- strategic development, and
- event development.

Several things became obvious during the development of the plan:

The tourism train is coming! And councils, businesses, industry, individuals can get on board, or not. Regardless, the train is still coming.

The amount of development and growth forecast in the next decade is phenomenal.

While the CBD will continue to dominate visitor share, however, Melbourne's West is forecast to yield the greatest growth in visitation over the next decade ahead of all other parts of Melbourne.

- Visitor nights are forecast to grow 85%; from 6.8 million to 12.4 million
- Visitor expenditure is forecast to grow 68%; from \$16.6m to \$2.3 billion

I've already mentioned the development of Avalon airport as an international gateway; and the Melbourne Airport Rail Link via the Sunshine hub;

- Add to that the West Gate Tunnel Project;
- The development of the Werribee Open Range Zoo masterplan;
- The Moonee Valley Race Course Development;
- The new Museum of the Future planned for Scienceworks;
- And the strategic waterfront development at Seaworks at Williamstown ...

The level of investment in the West is huge.

Branding

With so much development underway and in the pipeline, the opportunity is to reshape the way Melbourne's west is positioned and branded. We desperately need a visual identity to promote Melbourne's West;

- To give visitors a sense of place;
- and a promise about what our destination holds; through the authenticity of our community and experiences.

But branding Melbourne's west is not just about visitors. It's an opportunity to positively brand and market the west as an area to live, work, invest and play.

To that end, we have submitted a proposal via the Western Melbourne Partnership to the State Government for project funds of \$200,000 for destination brand development.

Budget

Which brings me to the topic of our budget.

The Board is very aware that it operates on a very tight budget (of \$135,000) and we are grateful to the 5 councils which fund Western Melbourne Tourism.

But, if Western Melbourne Tourism is to continue its work, or increase its capacity in any way, the current year-to-year funding scenario is not sustainable.

In the next year, we will be seeking to meet with Councils, and Lead West to develop a more viable funding model; that allows us to budget for projects that run more than 12 months.

This short-term funding is limiting, in the face of what needs to be achieved.

We'll also be seeking additional funding from local, state and federal governments as well as the private sector.

This is a priority if we are to deliver on our strategic plan and implement strategies from our Destination Management Visitor Plan.

Western Metropolitan Partnership

In other achievements over the last year, we have developed a much closer working relationship with the Western Metropolitan Partnership with a focus on the value of the visitor economy.

I mentioned the proposal for the destination brand campaign earlier, and we also submitted a second proposal related to the visitor experience by bike.

Both proposals have been adopted by the Western Partnership and submitted to the Minister.

Communications

Improving our communications has been another significant focus for the Board in the last 12 months.

We have made good headway with appointment of part time communications coordinator (Amy Gardiner) and a strategic PR consultant (Madeleine Blake) – both retained on an annual contract.

This is achieving value and benefit across the region

Some of the highlights have been:

- A comprehensive 'What's On In The West' e-newsletter distributed each month
- Significant upgrades to the WMT website – (with views up 55%)
- Major expansion of social media content with big growth in our following on all channels
- We have prepared media pitch material, conducted media famils and worked closely with Visit Victoria. We have achieved excellent some publicity including 5 features in The Age, 3 articles with Fairfax travel plus features with Qantas Inflight Magazine, Virgin Flying Foodie & Jetstar magazine.
- We will be hosting a lunch for the Australian Association of Travel Writers in February next year.

What's on Platform

We have continued the strategic development of Event Information across the region

And we are close to finalising the launch of a new digital platform, to make it much easier for consumers to find what events are on across our region.

Zomato Forum

In partnership with Zomato, we held a successful forum targeting the region's food and hospitality sector to help local businesses improve their digital profiles.

Experience Culture Victoria Guide

As a first for Melbourne's West, we coordinated five pages of listings and advertising in Victoria's Cultural Guide, profiling cultural attractions across our region.

Updated Printed map

We have completed further updates of our customised visitor map for Melbourne's west

Research

Apart from the substantial consumer research developed as part of the Greater Melbourne Destination Management Plan, we also commissioned research to track the economic contribution of tourism to the local economy.

In addition, we have sustained the annual profiling of visitors by segment groups, down to the local government level.

Ongoing strategic development

And as always, Western Melbourne Tourism has contributed to the strategic tourism development for the region:

- With ongoing participation in industry forums including the Werribee Tourism Precinct Group, Hobsons Bay and Melton tourism stakeholder groups, and the new #Startwest initiative for 'Start Up' enterprises;
- We have been part of the consultation for new visitor strategies for Hobsons Bay, Brimbank and Wyndham Councils
- We have had input in the development of a new School of the Visitor Economy at Victoria University, based in the region
- We have taken part in economic development forums, local business networking events, and
- provided advice to local operators as well supporting as new tourism development proposals with data.

My sincere thanks to my colleagues on the Board, for your support, expertise and insight.

I would also like to thank Rocky Barca from Parks Victoria who is stepping down from the Board.

Thanks to Lead West for the support it provides to Western Melbourne Tourism through its Memorandum of Understanding, and specifically thank Craig Rowley for his work as CEO of Lead West and Treasurer of WMT. You have always seen the value of visitor economy and its importance to our region.

Sincere thanks Richard Ponsford for his dedication to the role of Executive Officer; for his

energy in always advocating for the west, and responding to industry needs in our region. Your contribution is greatly valued.

Western Melbourne Tourism will continue to work collaboratively with councils, the tourism sector, government agencies and industry partners to grow the visitor economy in Melbourne's west

It's only through cohesion as a region can we achieve what's required for a thriving visitor economy and a destination that attracts people seeking an authentic Melbourne experience.


Jan Jacklin
Chair - Western Melbourne Tourism