



# Submission to the Parliament of Victoria Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria

May 2021

The City of Melbourne welcomes and supports the Parliament of Victoria Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria.

The health and wellbeing of our community is of paramount importance and the health impacts of air pollution is an area that should be thoroughly researched and acted upon to maintain our high living standard in Victoria, and to ensure that health risks associated with air pollution are actively and effectively eliminated or mitigated to an appropriate level.

## Climate Change

Growing air pollution in cities presents challenges for cities achieving both their health and climate change goals. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and events such as bushfires, heatwaves and thunderstorm asthma all impact air quality in Melbourne. For example, in January 2020 Melbourne's air quality was the worst in the world due to smoke from bushfires and Australia wide the bushfire smoke affected 80% of the population and contributed to hundreds of deaths (Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements - Report, 2020).

The air pollution and particulate matter (PM2.5) that is generated by the emission of GHGs and bushfire events can have adverse impacts on human health including cardiovascular and respiratory health, heart attacks and asthma attacks. Poor air quality particularly affects some of our more vulnerable residents, for example those with underlying health conditions such as asthma and other respiratory conditions.

The City of Melbourne's Climate Change Mitigation Strategy to 2050 recognises the benefits taking action on climate change can have on reducing air pollution. Health benefits are generated when actions to reduce emissions also address existing health challenges. Reducing emissions in the energy and transport sectors can reduce air pollution, which can lead to immediate improvements in cardiovascular and respiratory health, and result in fewer heart attacks and asthma attacks, and fewer hospital admissions.

The City of Melbourne would welcome the prioritisation of policies and interventions that simultaneously reduce air pollution and mitigate climate change. Investing in renewable energy can reduce health impacts and ecosystem impacts from air pollution. To achieve City of Melbourne's emissions reduction goals, the city's buildings, precincts and transport need to be electrified and powered by 100 per cent renewable energy. This requires a transition away from gas, petrol, diesel and coal. It will generate investment opportunities in clean energy infrastructure.

Increasing green infrastructure such as urban tree canopy, parks and gardens, green roofs can also improve air quality - it lowers greenhouse gas emissions, and leads to improvements in mental, physical and social health. Green infrastructure can also cool the city, reduce the impact of floods and provide shade and respite for people while they are travelling around the city.

The Victorian Government could consider supporting air quality improvement through the following ways:

1. Monitoring and measuring: improving air quality data collection, analysis, and communication in cities to identify sources, raise awareness, track progress, evaluate risk, and enforce policy.
2. Analysing health impacts: further research into the health impacts of air pollution and the benefits from taking action.
3. Policy implementation: implementing policies to address the sources of pollution and support a transition away from fossil fuels.

## Transport

The City of Melbourne's [Transport Strategy 2030](#)<sup>1</sup> notes that motor vehicles are a major source of pollution. In addition to carbon dioxide, motor vehicles emit particulates, nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds, which are harmful to human health.

The City of Melbourne would welcome initiatives to improve the measurement of air pollution in the city, particularly around busy roads with high volumes of diesel vehicles. Ideally, information about air pollution would be available publicly via the internet including advice to the public on how to minimise exposure. A comparison of air quality near busy roads with air quality in other parts of the city (parks, indoors, in quiet streets) would help us prioritise mitigation measures in relation to traffic pollution.

In February this year, the Lord Mayor wrote to the Minister for Public Transport, Minister Carroll, supporting the introduction of zero-emission buses in the central city, following the Victorian Government's announcement that it had allocated \$20 million in the new State budget for a trial of zero emission buses. One of the reasons the City of Melbourne supports zero emission buses is the need to improve the quality of the outdoor environment in the city, including reducing air pollution, to support all sorts of activity including outdoor dining as well as to reduce the harmful effects of pollution on health.

As an example, one of our major bus routes is Lonsdale Street. At peak times more than 1,400 people walk on Lonsdale Street between Swanston and Russell Streets every hour. There are more than 1000 bus movements each day on Lonsdale Street serving 16 bus routes. The buses run on diesel fuel, the emissions of which are implicated in human cancer, heart and lung damage, and undermining mental functioning.

Converting the Lonsdale Street bus corridor to zero emissions would be a significant step towards reducing the harm caused by air pollution in the city.

The City of Melbourne's Transport Strategy 2030 contains a range of other policies and actions to support a reduction in motor vehicle air pollution. These include:

- Promoting walking as the main mode of transport in the central city.
- Construction of protected bicycle lanes to make it safe for more Victorians to use bicycles for their daily travel needs. Riding bicycles is virtually pollution free.
- Attracting more people to use public transport, much of which runs on electricity and does not emit pollution in the city.
- Reducing the amount of traffic which travels through the City of Melbourne but does not have any business to transact in the city.
- Supporting the transition to electric power for private vehicles.
- Supporting the use of electric bicycles as a healthy, low-pollution alternative to driving.
- Prioritising lower emissions for commercial freight vehicles including ships. Container ships contribute 10 per cent of the total transport emissions in the City of Melbourne and have a significant impact on air quality due to the use of unrefined (bunker) fuel while in-port.

## Urban Development

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/transport-strategy-2030-city-of-melbourne.pdf>

The City of Melbourne is working closely with the Victorian Government on the development of some of Australia's most important urban renewal sites including Arden and Fishermans Bend. The planning visions for these precincts commit to achieving ambitious goals in transport, greening and energy use. If these are delivered, they will make a significant contribution to ensuring that the new precincts deliver much better air quality outcomes than current practice. They will also serve as demonstration projects for new ways of living and working sustainably. It will be important to ensure that the detailed policies, planning rules and local framework plans which will govern the development of these precincts strongly support the transition to sustainability and do not fall back to a business-as-usual approach.

## **Localised air pollution**

Significant research exists on the potential health effects of indoor cooking without adequate ventilation, however there appears to be a lack of research into the contribution and subsequent health impact of air pollution caused by cooking fumes being emitted to the local environment. Furthermore, there is no regulatory framework to monitor or control the quality of air being discharged from kitchen exhausts which may pose health risks in areas of dense residential living with a concentration of food businesses such as Melbourne's CBD. Research into this area is recommended to determine the contribution of cooking fumes to air pollution and subsequent health impacts.

Localised air pollution due to the popularity of 'fire-pits' in urbanised areas has given rise to complaints to councils about smoke affecting neighbours. It is requested that this area be considered in the inquiry to ascertain whether a state wide approach is appropriate.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make this submission.