

Roads, rails on agenda

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Additional road and rail infrastructure for Gippsland was high on the agenda of a strategic plan recently released.

Committee for Gippsland released its 16-point Strategic Plan, and according to executive director Mary Aldred, additional bypasses and duplication of lanes were identified as being necessary to attract people to the region and close the geographic gap between Gippsland and capital cities.

"We see improved time efficiencies, meaning access from Melbourne and New South Wales in a more efficient, and safe, manner as being a huge issue," Ms Aldred said.

This included efficiently completing duplication of the Princes Highway from Traralgon to Sale and giving consideration to duplicating lanes and bypasses between the Latrobe Valley and East Gippsland, in particular the Sale to Bairnsdale Highway duplication.

A series of other initiatives to develop Gippsland were also identified.

The plan suggests a cost-benefit analysis on transport options from other areas of Gippsland to Barry Beach and advocates for developing bulk capacity in South Gippsland (Barry Beach and Port Welshpool).

A 50-bed prison proposal has already attracted local attention and Ms Aldred said work towards securing another prison in Gippsland fit with the strong push expressed by businesses, during roundtable consultations, that attracting new investments and projects would be crucial during this region's transition to a low-carbon economy.

"We are not advocating that it should necessarily be located in the Latrobe Valley but we think this (the transition issue) should be taken into account and we have already commenced lobbying the State Government, and we have met with the Minister for Corrections to push our case," Ms Aldred said.

The State Government has confirmed \$2 million has been allocated for a detailed business case to be developed by the Department of Justice, and this will identify potential prison sites.

"We have certainly put Gippsland in the mix for this," Ms Aldred said.

Among others, initiatives the committee would like to see evolve are the commercialisation of a range of private pilot projects related to alternative uses of, and the potential export of, the region's world-class coal resource.

The plan covers research and development, infrastructure and technology-oriented initiatives.

Ms Aldred said the committee would be active in pursuing, or supporting other proponents in their efforts to pursue, government funding for identified projects as well as possible public-private partnerships where appropriate.