

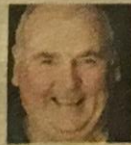
Infrastructure windfall must be shared around

RURAL and regional Victorians wanting a more balanced approach to the development of their state are unlikely to see their aspirations realised for at least another 30 years if draft recommendations to the Andrews Government go unchallenged.

The recommendations are contained in a 30-year plan prepared by Infrastructure Victoria.

The plan will be presented to the Victorian Government next month to guide it in the spending of up to a \$100 billion in capital works.

Central to the plan is the idea of "increased densification", which involves giving infrastructure needs in Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and



Rural areas must be included in Victoria's infrastructure spend, says **GREG WALSH**

WEEKLY TIMES

NOV 9 2016 p22

Bendigo priority over the rest of the state.

More than 80 per cent of Victorians live in these four urban centres, which together cover less than 20 per cent of the state's land mass.

According to Infrastructure Victoria, the population of these four centres will rise from just over five million at present to about eight million in 2046, including more than seven million in Melbourne.

It is therefore in these four urban

centres that Infrastructure Victoria recommends the Andrews Government should concentrate its capital works spending.

This is not to suggest that the Infrastructure Victoria report has nothing to say about the needs of the rest of the state.

The report does comment on the need to upgrade regional and local roads and improve regional bus and train services, but many of these recommendations are prefaced by a re-

quirement for further study rather than action in the short term.

Consideration of major regional infrastructure projects such as building waste to energy plants or new dams, improving communications technology or developing very fast rail services are largely dismissed for one reason or another.

Premier Andrews should look beyond Infrastructure Victoria for additional evidence-based advice and use this to build on the success previous governments have had in strengthening cities and towns in regional Victoria.

• **Greg Walsh is chairman of Champions of the Bush and a farmer**