

MUNICIPAL PROFILE

Regional Role and Context

The City of Yarra comprises an area of 19.5 square kilometres, is located north and east of the City of Melbourne and is bounded by the Yarra River to the south and east. The Cities of Moreland and Darebin abut Yarra's northern boundary, with Boroondara and Stonnington situated to the east and south respectively.

Yarra's location on the City of Melbourne's eastern boundary means Yarra plays a critical role in the inner metropolitan region. Yarra hosts:

- A range of opportunities for inner city living.
- Regional open space along the Yarra River and Merri and Darebin Creeks.
- Specialised retail shopping strips, entertainment and arts venues and services.
- Regional cultural services.
- Major hospital and associated specialist medical services.
- Community services of regional significance including TAFEs, the University of the Third Age, the Australian Catholic University, Epworth and St Vincent's hospitals.
- Aboriginal services of State significance.
- Business activities and employment hubs with a regional catchment.
- Public transport including trains, trams and buses, servicing the surrounding suburbs and beyond, pass through and service Yarra.
- Two freeways (servicing the eastern and south eastern suburbs) as well as major arterials pass through Yarra, into the City of Melbourne and beyond.

The following profile is based on the 2006 Census data.

The People

A growing population

The number of people living in Yarra in 2006 was 69,330 – an increase of 3.4% since the 2001 Census. This was lower than the growth rate for the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) as a whole (7.6%).

According to the Department of Sustainability and Environment (2004 Victoria in Future Summary), population growth in Yarra will continue to increase to 2030 but the rate of growth will slow as residential redevelopment opportunities diminish. The estimated resident population of Yarra is projected to increase to about 90,000 people by 2031. This equates to an average annual increase of 0.89 per cent between 2001 and 2031. In the same period the population of Victoria is projected to increase at an average annual rate of 0.87 per cent and Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) by 0.90 per cent.

Smaller households

Mean household size in Yarra has fallen from 2.3 persons per household in 1991 to 2.2 in 1996 and 2.13 in 2006. This trend is expected to continue. This has remained consistently below the average household size for the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD), which fell from 2.8 to 2.7 over the same time period. In Yarra 32.4% of households are single person households.

Relatively fewer children and elderly persons than the rest of Melbourne

The age distribution of Yarra's population also varies from the MSD with 13% (excluding overseas visitors) of people aged under 17 and 7.4% aged over 70. Both these percentages are lower than the MSD totals of 22.9% and 9.1% respectively, indicating that most of the population is

concentrated in the working or student age ranges. In the MSD, people aged between 18 and 49 made up 47.8% of the total population. In Yarra, this figure was 62.8%, more than half the population.

Diversity of people

Yarra is culturally diverse and the home for a number of newly arrived migrants and refugees. Of Yarra's population, 61.2% were born in Australia and 27.2% born overseas (11.6% of respondents to the Census did not report their place of birth). Of the people born overseas, the largest groups were from Vietnam 14%, the United Kingdom 14%, New Zealand 9.4%, Greece 7.9% and Italy 5.8%. Indigenous people represent 0.43% of Yarra's population.

Occupation

The majority of Yarra's population is of working or student age. In 2006 5.1% of Yarra residents were unemployed compared with the overall rate for Victoria of 5.4%.

The largest of the nine occupation groups in Yarra was Professionals at 40%, compared with 21% for the MSD. The next largest group for Yarra was Clerical, Sales and Service Workers at 24.4% –less than for the MSD (30.4%). In contrast, Tradespersons and Related Workers made up only 5.3%, compared with 11.2% for the MSD.

Pockets of disadvantage

Yarra is also diverse in terms of advantage (employment opportunities, educational attainment, housing ownership/tenancy, etc) and wealth. While the municipality is changing and an increasing number of professionals and higher income earners are moving into Yarra, the municipality remains home to a large number of low-income people.

Housing

As inner city living became increasingly sought after in the 1970s and 1980s, the renovation of 19th century housing stock and warehouse conversions in the 1990s and the increased growth in multi-unit developments through the early 2000s, resulted in a change to Yarra's housing stock which has become less affordable.

In comparison to the MSD, Yarra has more medium and high density housing, such as flats and units, and fewer separate houses. Yarra averages just over 39 dwellings per hectare of residentially zoned land, similar to the inner urban average of 37.4 but more than double the metropolitan average of only 18.2.

Yarra also has a high proportion of rental housing (47.7% as opposed to 24.5% for the MSD) and the highest number of residents in public housing per capita in Victoria with 10.5% of the population in public housing.

Housing growth

Under Melbourne 2030 the Inner Region comprising the Cities of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington (part) and Yarra is required to provide 90,000 additional dwellings. The Inner Region municipalities have along with the Department of Sustainability and Environment worked together to determine how this would be achieved and have together prepared the Inner Regional Housing Statement, November 2005. Yarra's share of this is 12,800 additional dwellings with 85% to be provided on strategic redevelopment sites.

Whilst the Inner Region offers considerable opportunity for further housing growth, it needs to occur in specific locations that have a demonstrated capacity to accommodate intensification. Likewise, great sensitivity is required in planning for intensification of residential development in these locations.

In line with Melbourne 2030, an increased proportion of new housing development will be encouraged on strategic redevelopment sites located close to activity centres and public transport. Conversely, reduced levels of growth will occur in established residential areas.

This approach will protect and enhance the characteristics and attributes of local areas that make them highly attractive and liveable, whilst allowing for significant opportunities in some locations to be better utilised.

The strategic outcomes are consistent with the Melbourne 2030 objective for new housing opportunities to be well located, close to transport and activity centres.

The Economy

Some 4,500 businesses operate within Yarra, employing about 55,000 people, reflecting a significant local economy that has transformed itself from its historical industrial base to a sophisticated business and service economy.

Activity centres

Yarra's vibrant Major Activity Centres, being the retail strip centres of Brunswick, Smith, Victoria and Swan Streets and Bridge Road, are a powerful economic engine for the municipality, and in varying degrees draw on tourists and destination shoppers from overseas, interstate and country Victoria as well as Greater Melbourne.

These activity centres are a vital part of Yarra's culture and continue to evolve. The past two decades has seen a virtual reinstatement of their regional service role, a function which they had commanded through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century prior to the car based suburbanisation of Melbourne. However this regional role is no longer driven by mainstream retail operations. Rather it is driven by the aggregation of niche offerings in fashion, hospitality, entertainment, and homewares. Yarra's activity centres rely on their regional function with a high proportion of retail turnover coming from outside the municipality. Yarra also has a range of Neighbourhood Activity Centres which play an important local role.

Commerce

The expansion of the tertiary sector and its location in the inner Melbourne region close to the CBD has already resulted in Yarra being an increasing focus for finance, property and business services, cultural/recreational tourism, and wholesale and distribution activities. Yarra has also become a preferred location for many smaller and medium sized businesses, particularly those in computer technology, marketing and design. This trend is expected to continue.

Industry

Corresponding to the increase in professional employment, the traditional heavy industrial activity of the past is being replaced by modern enterprises involved in assembly, warehousing and distribution and research and application of technology. Industry has moved away from the traditional textile, clothing and footwear to printing, publishing, recorded media, and business services and office activities.

While traditional manufacturing activity has declined, a core of these types of enterprises still remain in the municipality, many of which are responding to economic pressures through embracing new technologies and identifying specialist and export markets. Yarra remains home to a number of large, well-established industrial firms including Carlton and United Beverages and Amcor.

Arts and culture

Yarra's role as a centre for live music is widely acknowledged, along with the capacity of Yarra's music venues to support emerging musicians. Yarra is also known for the number and diversity of commercial and community arts and cultural facilities located in the municipality, in particular the high number of commercial art galleries. Many of the activities are concentrated in the vicinity of Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, and at the southern end of Smith and Brunswick Streets, Fitzroy. A number of galleries are also located in Richmond.

Transport

Amenity is adversely impacted by high volumes of traffic moving through the municipality, much of it bound for destinations outside Yarra. In Yarra 20.1% of households do not have motor vehicles, compared with 9.4% for the MSD.

A positive outcome of Yarra's central location is its access to well established public transport networks. This is reflected in the fact that 42.1% of the population walked, cycled or used public transport to travel to work compared with 15.9% for the MSD. Trends for non-car travel and in particular for cycling are on the increase.

There are many factors that attract people to the City of Yarra, including its location in relation to the CAD, the range of shops, food and drink and entertainment facilities. Public transport is one of a number of factors. Currently public transport in Yarra suffers from overcrowding. In peak hour there is little spare capacity on train or tram services.

Most of Yarra is within easy access of public transport. However residents report many limitations in the public transport system, especially when travelling from the north of Yarra to the southeast. This is heightened at night when bus services become far less frequent, and tram and train service levels are lower or non-existent.

Public transport in Yarra includes 14 tram routes, nine rail stations, five train lines (Belgrave, Epping, Glen Waverley, Hurstbridge and Lilydale), and 23 bus services. The main issues for residents include frequency, time span of services, safety, crowding, and inadequate staffing levels of both stations and trains.

Trams are the most important individual motorised sustainable transport mode in Yarra. Trams are used by 12.7% of Yarra's residents daily to get to work, compared with Melbourne's average at 2.0%. Trams also rate highest for all daily trips, Monday to Sunday from Yarra to all parts of Melbourne, after car trips and walking. Trams are facing the problem of growing interference from traffic, reducing tram reliability and making services slower.

Rail patronage by Yarra residents (9.2%) is higher than the Melbourne average (8.5%). The poor quality of station environments is a major factor preventing better patronage. Most stations in Yarra are uninviting and safety at stations is a critical issue.

There are 23 bus services that run through Yarra. Patronage is very low with just 1.4% of residents using the bus for their journey to work¹⁵ (slightly higher than the Melbourne average of 1.2%).

There is a need to address the significant traffic and transport challenges facing Yarra, however these require intervention by road and public transport authorities. Council is very active in lobbying for change that will reduce the impact of traffic and improve public transport.

Built Form

Analysis of Yarra's built form shows a clear picture of a low rise urban form with areas of higher development.

The range of residential built form types incorporates 'urban' residential areas that present uninterrupted terraced frontages to the street, often with little or no front setback. Other inner areas, while still predominantly small in lot size, present a more suburban appearance with modest front setbacks, often with cottage front gardens and small gaps between buildings. In Fairfield and Alphington, there is a more spacious, garden character, with generous front and side setbacks, large back yards, and a profusion of vegetation. The large public housing estates provide a contrasting built form character of apartment buildings set in landscaped grounds. There are also examples of larger scale modern infill development.

Yarra's retail activity centres, extending along much of Yarra's arterial road network, are prominent components of the urban fabric.

Heritage

Yarra's traditional owners are the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. The Kulin nation comprised five distinct language groups. There is some dispute as to the exact boundaries between the various clans and groups. However it is clear that the area around central Melbourne was a significant meeting place for the Kulin clans. The area that is now known as Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy was the land of the Wurundjeri people.

Yarra is formed from the former Cities of Fitzroy, Richmond, Collingwood and the suburbs of Princes Hill, North Carlton, Alphington, and part of Fairfield. In the years after European settlement, Fitzroy became Melbourne's first suburb and today is an excellent example of the building fabric of the 1850s and 1860s. The history of development can be traced in the transition of the heritage fabric across Yarra. While Yarra is mostly known for its Victorian and Edwardian streetscapes, there are pockets of significant interwar fabric.

Many significant public, civic and private buildings can be found throughout the municipality and large areas are of post-colonial cultural heritage significance.

The 'World Heritage Environs Area' (WHEA) surrounds the World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, Carlton. The WHEA, which includes land within South Fitzroy, acts as a buffer zone for the World Heritage property and provides a setting and context of significant historic character for the World Heritage property.

Open space resources

Yarra has a wide range of open space from urban pocket parks to areas with high natural values. The Merri Creek and Yarra River have adjoining linear open space reserves which are valued by residents of Yarra and wider metropolitan Melbourne for their recreational and nature conservation values. Yarra is also renowned for the large historical gardens particularly Edinburgh Gardens in North Fitzroy and Darling Gardens in Clifton Hill.

There is an inherent discrepancy in open space distribution across the municipality due to historical settlement patterns and types of land use. The majority of Yarra's open space is located in the north-eastern area of the municipality with just over 70% located in North Fitzroy, Clifton Hill, Alphington and Fairfield, where 25% of the population lives. By contrast, Collingwood has just 0.12 hectares of open space with 7.4% of the population in residence there. 13% of Yarra's population lives in Fitzroy where there is a total of 2.2 hectares of open space. Other areas with almost no open space include Cremorne and North Richmond. There are important open space resources adjacent to Yarra's boundary, one of which is Princes Park.

The Environment And Natural Systems

Yarra is highly urbanised and the natural environment has been substantially modified. Consequently the waterways, parklands and public open spaces are important in an otherwise highly developed area.

The Yarra River, and Darebin and Merri Creeks form an important ecological corridor.

Urban development has reduced the diversity of indigenous flora and fauna and resulted in the loss of native habitats. Few areas of remnant native vegetation remain in the municipality except some along the Yarra River and the northern waterways. These areas of regional, high local or local significance have been identified so that they can be protected.

The Yarra River corridor is enhanced by a range of associated recreational opportunities, including the Main Yarra Trail, Fairfield Park Boathouse, Yarra Bend Park, Dights Falls, Abbotsford Convent, and the Collingwood Children's Farm.