

Ballarat Station Southside Precinct Master Plan

Phase 1 Community Engagement Report

June 2021



Project overview

The Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) and the City of Ballarat (Council) are creating the *Ballarat Station Southside Master Plan* to guide the redevelopment of the Ballarat Station's southern precinct into a new destination for Ballarat.

Located in the heart of the CBD, Ballarat Station is a major transport gateway and a 'destination station' for both residents and visitors.

The master plan and associated planning scheme amendment will provide certainty for the community about potential future development of the southern precinct surrounding the Station and will give developers the confidence to continue to invest in the Ballarat CBD.

The master plan will be the first step in unlocking new opportunities and improvements within the precinct.



Aims of the master plan

1. Protect and celebrate the rich heritage of the station precinct
2. Guide the development of government land to the south of the beloved Ballarat Station
3. Support the precinct as it becomes a commercial, civic and tourism destination
4. Improve connectivity, accessibility and deliver a vibrant community space for residents and visitors to enjoy
5. Attract investment, jobs and new commercial opportunities into the city.



Extra information

Project partners

The VPA is working in partnership with City of Ballarat to prepare the master plan.

Other government agencies including the Department of Transport, Heritage Victoria, Regional Development Victoria, and VLine are working closely on this project. VicTrack are the primary government land holder in the precinct.

Once finalised and in the planning scheme, the master plan will work in conjunction with other planning controls, such as the heritage overlay currently applied to this area, to set the rules for any future development within the precinct boundary. This will assist State Government and private landowners within the precinct to redevelop their land in line with the vision of the master plan.

Fast Track Program

In response to COVID-19, the VPA is working on a special economic stimulus package of projects that will deliver \$18billion in homes and jobs to the Victorian economy. The *Ballarat Station Southside Master Plan* has been identified as a project on the VPA's Fast Track Program.

"Be brave, be creative, treasure what we have and enhance the value of the spaces."

– anonymous survey respondent

Community feedback

From 18 January until 22 February 2021, the VPA invited the Ballarat community to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas about the Ballarat Southside precinct to assist us in shaping the master plan.

The key aims of this engagement process were to capture local knowledge and understand the community views and future aspirations about the area.

To ensure a representative range of feedback was heard, the views of Ballarat residents, local business owners, transport users, and representative community groups were captured through a variety of remote engagement tools.

The engagement activities responded to COVID-19 public health restrictions.

This report details the key themes raised through

the public consultation process, which will shape the VPA's understanding of which parts of the Southside precinct should be preserved, and which parts should be improved. Some of the feedback received addressed concerns which are outside of the scope of the master planning process but has been included in this report to recognise its importance to local community members.

Thank you to everyone who contributed by getting involved in the public consultation process. Hundreds of suggestions and comments were heard and will be considered in detail as the master planning process progresses.

How we engaged

Promotion

Our social media ads were seen

274,417

times over 5 weeks



Letterbox drop to



1,150
properties



Posters
displayed
at station
& Bridge
Street Mall



60
direct letters
to precinct
landowners
& occupiers

Local news features in:

- Ballarat Courier
- ABC
- 3BA Radio



Information available on:

- VPA website
- Ballarat MySay
- Engage Victoria



7,781

visits to the
project's
Engage Victoria page



The project team continues to meet with government agencies, Ballarat City Council, service providers and landowners throughout its planning to ensure the process is coordinated and well-informed.

Consultation tools



211
survey
responses



131
pins on the
interactive map



1 on 1
phone & video meetings
with community
members

Meetings
with key
community
groups



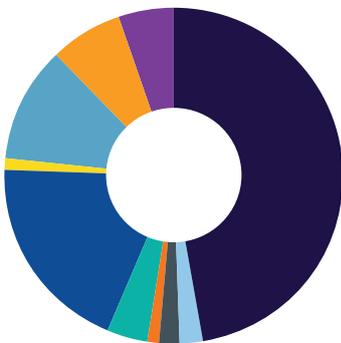
Written
feedback
from
11 submissions



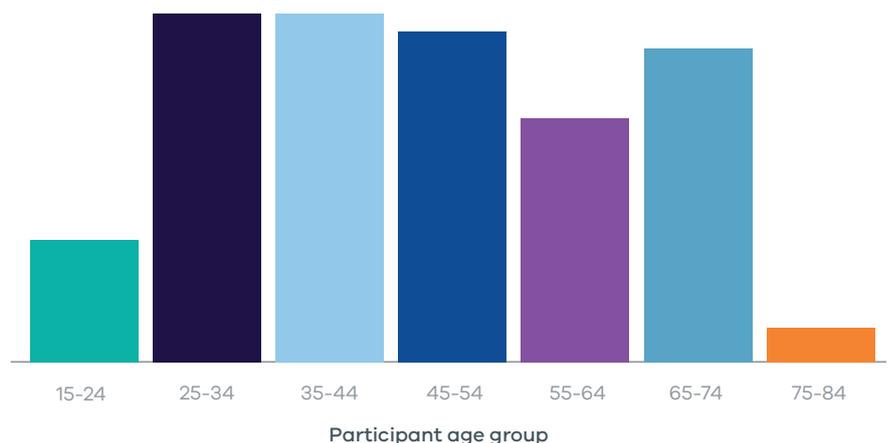
"People want commitment to the precinct and to protecting and looking after heritage assets".
– anonymous,
online meeting

Participant profile

What is your primary purpose for using the precinct?



- Other
- Using station facilities or other services (public toilets, kiosk, airport shuttle etc.)
- Picking up people from the station/bus terminal
- Parking only
- Move through the precinct to get to somewhere else
- I work in the precinct
- I visit the precinct as a tourist or for business
- I shop in the precinct
- As a social meeting place
- As a local commuter using the train and bus



What we heard

Feedback tells us that the Ballarat community values some of the features of the current Southside precinct but also identifies many areas that could be improved.



What you love most about the precinct

 **Heritage and character of the station and surrounding area, including the bluestone buildings**

"One of the most magnificent railway station buildings in Australia. Clean and restore it, then KEEP it maintained in good condition."
– anonymous, interactive online map

 **It being a landmark within the city**

"Love being able to see the stunning train station building and the bluestone buildings, from all different parts of Ballarat, it's a wonderful link to the past that has been maintained with love and careful consideration".
– anonymous, interactive online map

 **The Engine Shed, signal boxes and heritage gates**

 **Ability to drop off and pick up on the south side of the station.**

"Thank you Engage Vic - this has been a fun exercise and I really feel ...um... engaged!"
– anonymous survey respondent



What you would like to see changed or improved



Restore and maintain the heritage buildings

"At the moment there appears to be some areas little utilised because of fire damage, other areas shabby, with caked on paint etc".

- anonymous, interactive online map



Improve accessibility and disability compliance – especially between Mair Street/station and between station platforms

"Disabled access between station platforms is needed urgently, a legislative requirement and should be done in manner to respect the building heritage e.g. underground tunnel."

- anonymous, interactive online map



Improve pedestrian access between Mair Street and the station

"The pathway and linkage between Mair and station could be improved with less steep slope, seats, landscaping, lighting etc."

- anonymous, interactive online map

"A handy shortcut, needs to be a shared path pedestrians/bicycles".

- anonymous, interactive online map

"Coffee lane walkway is a difficult area due to the steep terrain. Pathway could be upgraded and replanting of embankment with improved lighting".

- anonymous, interactive online map



Create a better sense of arrival for incoming trains to welcome visitors and locals to Ballarat

"The station addresses Lydiard St awkwardly and the first impression for a visitor is the visual chaos of the back of Reid's Guesthouse. Could we screen this and create an open civic space as the public transport entry to the city?"

- anonymous, interactive online map



Provide more amenity and community infrastructure, including improved public toilets, car parking, bike shelters and storage spaces



Give more consideration to the bus terminals, both local and regional, to ensure good access and safety



Create an open space plaza for gatherings and other community uses, including a heritage museum which tells the story of the town

"...area for our farmers markets would be a great addition & draw locals and visitors to this space."

- anonymous, interactive online map

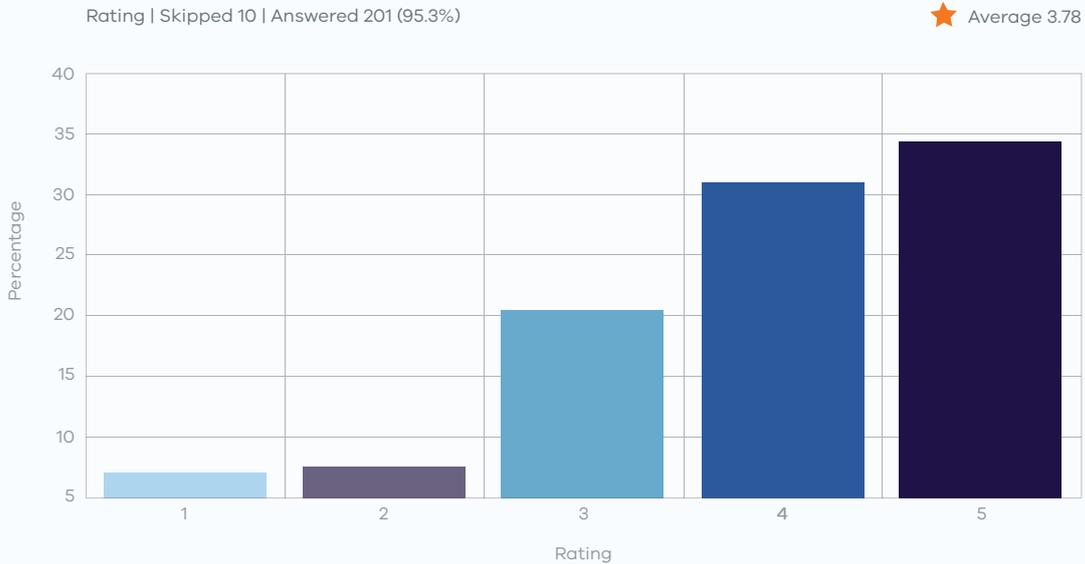
"The station exit is the face of Ballarat. The area outside the station should simultaneously showcase heritage buildings, pedestrian friendly spaces (plaza, cafes, restaurants etc) and greenery. Parking should be hidden underground or north side."

- anonymous survey respondent

Testing the early vision

To what extent do you agree with this draft vision?

"...the station must continue to provide its critical transport functions in a manner that meets contemporary needs, but the broader precinct has the capacity to become a commercial, civic and tourism destination."



A draft vision statement was tested with the community through the online survey.

65% of respondents supported or strongly supported the draft vision (scores of 4 or 5 out of 5).

20% of people felt neutral towards it (scored 3 out of 5)

14% didn't support in some form (scores of 1 or 2 out of 5).

In general, people think the vision should ensure the area's core function as a transport hub is maintained, but should also address the importance of the heritage of the Station and capitalise on the opportunity to improve people's experience of the station.

Several responses questioned how the vision would be achieved through planning.

Support

"Good call. The station is the door - but the precinct has so much more to offer. Just like in cities the world over, people want to live near transport. Greater density and better housing will bring life to the CBD."

"Creating a community space should be part of the vision, as long as the plan does not impact surrounding residential homes. No noise is paramount!"

Other:

"Nice open ended statement with no clear 'how'."

"Station needs to function as a station but could be better as a precinct, especially after the north side has been developed with shops and hotel."

Against:

"must remain critical transport centre, not be turned into Disney Land play area."

Community insights

We've summarised the key points we heard through the survey, interactive map and community meetings into a list of key insights.

- The heritage of the precinct and broader Ballarat is extremely important to the community (88% of survey respondents).
- Pedestrian and vehicle access and safety into and around the Station was raised as a key concern (68% of people prefer to drive their car to the precinct).
- Connection between the Station and Mair Street is a challenge for participants, as it currently feels unsafe, and the existing pathway not designed for people of all abilities.
- The topography of the precinct, especially the steep embankment, makes it a challenging space to use.
- Just over half of people who visit this precinct feel safe there currently. Of those who feel unsafe, inadequate lighting, poor connection between the Station and Mair Street and difficult pedestrian access around the bus terminal were the main reasons why.
- Although nearly all respondents valued the beauty of the station building, nearly 70% said the rest of the precinct is extremely or somewhat unattractive. Feedback indicated there is a general need for a refresh or restoration of the area, as right now it lacks activity, has insufficient parking and the area is messy due to the derelict buildings. Suggestion to improve this were to bring new uses, such as retail and cafes, to the area so it feels more welcoming.
- Public art, information boards, public spaces, or museums were popular suggestions for celebrating the history of the Station and Wadawurrung people within the precinct.

"Start listening!there are more best interests than just yours."

– anonymous survey respondent

- 71% of people feel that the precinct does not currently provide good access to public facilities
 - » *"Public toilets in the station aren't the nicest. Bike storage inadequate, I wouldn't want to leave mine there. Visitor information subpar. Shelter almost up to par. Under-utilised area as far as public amenities go in general."* – survey respondent
 - » *"It's poor on all accounts. Poor shelter waiting for the bus. Public toilets within the station. The bike storage is usually full, and it's also on the wrong side of the station (no disability/pedestrian access), and the open spaces are soulless."* – survey respondent
 - » *"It's not been designed to be a public space. This needs to be embraced by including accessible green spaces which could also be used for dining and entertainment purposes".* – survey respondent

Please don't's

Some community members provided examples of planning outcomes they don't want to see delivered for this precinct:

"Please do not simply allow more shops to pop up there (other than a small supermarket)."

– anonymous survey respondent

"Do not destroy the buildings or make the insides look too modern. It should feel historic and culturally significant."

– anonymous survey respondent

"Don't ask us if you're not going to listen".

– anonymous survey respondent

The VPA will consider these requests as it moves to prepare its draft master plan.

Non-planning feedback

Some of the feedback heard during the consultation process cannot be addressed through this planning process but is still important to acknowledge.

1. "Leave the station building alone"

VPA response:

The station building is heritage listed and any proposed works will be subject to approval under the Heritage Act and the Ballarat City Council Planning Scheme. The master planning process may identify some opportunities for further consideration to restore and improve the interior or exterior of the building. The exterior of the buildings will not be altered through the Ballarat Station Southside precinct master plan.

The focus of the master plan is to honour the unique history of the area and suggest planning changes for the surrounding Station precinct.

2. "Fix the gates"

VPA response:

There is a lot of change happening around the precinct, with a range of active projects being led by other government agencies and Council. Vline is currently working in consultation with government agencies to determine the reopening of the Lydiard Street North Railway Crossing.

The Ballarat Station Southside master plan will not look to redo any work that is currently committed or underway. Instead, it will ensure that the planning for the Ballarat Station Southside Precinct connects with and recognises the important opportunities that these active projects bring.

3. "Increase the train services"

VPA response:

In January 2021, VLine commenced its new timetable for the Ballarat line, providing a major boost to frequency and reliability for the growing communities along the line, with services every 20 minutes during the peak, and every 40 minutes in between the peaks.

4. "Consolidate fragmented land ownership to ensure coordinated development"

VPA response:

The master plan will become the first step in unlocking new opportunities and improvements within the precinct. This is the first project in a pipeline of future projects that will be required to achieve the future vision for the area. Lot consolidation could form part of future planning and investigations to be undertaken by others.

Planning for your objectives

Key drivers for change

The master plan will respond to community feedback wherever possible. The planning actions outlined below explore ways that the master plan can deliver on the key themes summarised in this report.

1 Protect and enhance the heritage value and aesthetic of the station complex while preserving its visual dominance within the precinct.

2 Improve the accessibility of the precinct by providing better connections:

- to move through and beyond into Lydiard Street, Mair Street and other key areas of the Ballarat CBD for people of all abilities.
- to move between the northside and southside precincts of the Station.

3 Ensure the master plan encourages opportunities for new uses and spaces for visitors and transport users to enjoy, such as cafes and shops, green spaces or a visitor information centre.

4 Improve facilities within the precinct to meet contemporary design standards that support the needs of people of all abilities inc. toilets, shelters and waiting areas.

5 Ensure the master plan considers Ballarat's weather conditions by providing shelter and all-weather protection as well as appropriate landscaping choices.

"It would be great to improve the size and weather protection of this bus stop. Fed Uni (Mt Helen) has a great example of a bus stop that offers a space to wait for the bus out of the rain."

– anonymous survey respondent

6 Create a sense of arrival for locals and visitor by improving the aesthetics and function of the station forecourt.

7 Celebrate the culture and history of Ballarat through public art, design of public spaces, landscaping and displays.

8 Value the core function of this precinct as a transport hub.

Other considerations

Provide clear, transparent updates to the community at the Ballarat Station Southside Masterplan process progresses.

Next steps in the planning process

Feedback heard during the first phase of consultation will be used to inform the preparation of the draft Ballarat Station Southside master plan.

The draft master plan and associated draft planning scheme amendment will be made available for public comment later in 2021.

Following the next round of final public consultation, the VPA and City of Ballarat will work to resolve any feedback provided by the community. If matters cannot be resolved, submitters will be invited to have their concerns heard by an independent Standing Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC will then provide advice to the Minister and the VPA prior to the VPA finalising the amendment for the Minister for Planning consideration.

"ALL feedback needs considering, those giving feedback are the users, locals & ultimately people who care."

– anonymous survey respondent

Timeline

