

FIGHTBACK TIME



There's an undeniable city and country divide on big-ticket infrastructure projects

DAVID JOCHINKE

Victorian Farmers Federation president David Jochinke in a canola field in Tarrington, Victoria. Picture: NICOLE CLEARY

Rebound, better



PAUL GUERRA
VCCI CEO

VICTORIA, it's time to be bold. When we restart let's rebound stronger and better than before. We need to bridge the gap between where we left off and where we want to be. We need to make Victoria the best place in Australia to operate a business.

We must protect the future of our businesses, big and small, to safeguard our liveability and prosperity as we turn our minds to living and working under "COVID-normal". That is the key to ensuring the Victoria that we know and love not only endures but thrives. We can do that together.

The first need is immediate: we must soften the blow the pandemic and restrictions have dealt business by lowering taxes — permanently!

Grants and JobKeeper have thrown a necessary lifeline to most businesses. Government has also deferred imposts such as payroll tax, land tax and stamp duty.

But what happens down the track when businesses must pay up? They will need some careful support.

We must grab the opportunity to undertake reforms that keep businesses competitive as our economy, industry and way of working continues to change. Now is the time to bold. The best pathway to achieve that is a bigger economy, not a smaller one.

A blueprint for fundamental tax reform must outline options for shifting the state's revenue base toward more efficient, productivity enhancing taxes, while

lowering the overall burden of business taxes. The longer-term abolition of payroll tax must be a key objective. A tax that penalises businesses for employing people has no place in our restart.

We also need to reclaim our global reputation for quality tourism experiences, world class events, food, fashion, and quality, trusted products. It's why our state is the greatest in Australia.

Finally, we need the next big build to take us into 2030 and beyond. Victoria's infrastructure pipeline has provided a significant boost to the economy over recent years and has been the cornerstone of our apprenticeship and traineeship workforce.

Planning for and building infrastructure for future generations will make Victoria a better place to live and work, while stimulating jobs for local small and large businesses across the state.

We've got this Victoria. It's time to leverage our collective strengths and collaborate at every level.

Let us be defined by our response to COVID-19. Let's come back swinging!

Governments need to provide more support for businesses and cut costs.

Leading way with solidarity

THE building and construction industry is ready to lead the recovery of Victoria's economy out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past seven months, both employers and more than 300,000 workers across our state have adapted to the new COVID-safe environment and our sector has been working with government to fuel the 13 per cent of the economy it accounts for.

Like many other industries, our sector has faced severe COVID-19 challenges. Uncertainty remains; renovation work is still not allowed on occupied premises.

It's vital everyone in this sector get back to work as soon as possible and, for them to survive through to the recovery, it's essential that renovations and alterations businesses are included in round three of the business support fund.

It's unprecedented to see employer associations and unions work in such solidarity. Together, employers and unions have proactively implemented



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CEO, MASTER BUILDERS VICTORIA

bespoke COVID-19 industry guidelines and safety that have kept the infection and transmission rates well below community average.

We know there is still a long road ahead. That's why Master Builders Victoria has again partnered with unions and employer groups to roll out a new campaign reinforcing the importance of COVID-safe measures, and that our sector continues to work with state and federal governments on other measures.

The HomeBuilder program provided a boost so extension of that and similar programs which stimulate building will be crucial.

There are other ways to get this part of our economy moving too. A reduction in Victoria's high stamp duty, combined with a reduction

in red tape and levies related to building and construction, would incentivise the activity that our economy needs.

The government could consider renovation stimulus measures that are tied to improving the energy efficiency of existing homes to reduce energy bills and create jobs.

Liquidated damages remain a concern and it's important to resolve this so builders are not exposed contractually by not meeting deadlines at a time when productivity is slashed, through no fault of their own.

While the primary focus must remain on public health, it's imperative that everyone continues to work together and support each other so that our industry can fully fuel the Victorian economy once again.

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Make city marvellous again

ASK not what Melbourne can do for you, ask what you can do for Melbourne.

It's a tweak on President John F. Kennedy's call to arms in 1961, when he asked the American people to work collectively to build a stronger nation. This concept of self-sacrifice resonated deeply with the Depression and war generations, who were middle-aged by the 1960s.

This is precisely what Melbourne and Victoria need right now: a public awareness program to focus collective efforts into rebuilding businesses, contributing to prosperity, and making our community more connected, more caring, more prosperous.

Imagine if five million Melburnians thought every day how they could make a contribution to this goal. Work hard, volunteer, take a business risk, take on an apprentice, pick up rubbish, encourage someone who's having a go, build a culture proud of our way of life, and make a daily contribution to making Melbourne just that little bit better.

I am impressed by the environmental movement that has built a culture where most



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people "think global, act local". Can we create a similar mindset where everyone is focused on building a better Melbourne? The trick is to provide examples of things that can be done to build a sense of recovery, to re-establish this city and this state as the preferred place on the Australian continent to live, learn, laugh and prosper.

I'd call this program Build a Better Melbourne. I'd rope in Melbourne identities to support the cause. I'd set up a social media page where people could post the things they're doing to "build a better Melbourne". I'd make it fun, inclusive and public. I'd want every patriotic Melburnian on board and then I'd set about luring across the cynics and the naysayers. There's a seat for everyone on my Build a Better Melbourne bus, or should that be tram?

There can be no doubt

building a better Melbourne requires jobs that are plentiful, secure, well-paid and accessible to anyone with the skills to do the work. But in times of change, there's the question of what will the jobs of the future be? I have always thought this is putting the cart before the horse.

Before there can be jobs of the future, there must be businesses of the future. There are (or were) 13 million workers in Australia and 2.5 million businesses, ranging from milk bars to BHP.

About two million businesses are small businesses; imagine if the broad base of the business pyramid could be encouraged to take on a single employee.

Now is not the time to snipe from the shadows. It's time to step up and ask what you can do to help make Melbourne marvellous again.

Sector-specific rule books to safely reopen hairdressers, beauty salons, gyms, cafes, concert venues, airports and everything in between.