Our story so far

Since 2016, the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership has been listening to the voices of our community and to stakeholders from across our region.

Through three widely-attended Regional Assemblies and numerous smaller meetings across the region, the Partnership has heard what is important to people in Ovens Murray and it has taken these voices directly to Government.

Government has listened and, as a result of the Partnership’s efforts, a range of projects have been funded.

For example, the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership has been very active, among others, in advocating for passenger rail improvements on the North East Line which has seen a $235 million investment over the past three years. New trains are also on their way for the line.

The Wangaratta Digital Hub, funded in the Victorian Budget 2018/19, has now opened its doors, while planning work is underway for a new Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing iconic walking trail.

But the Partnership has achieved much more than simply winning funding.

The Partnership has also played an important role in bringing together diverse groups, as well as stakeholders from across governments, departments and sectors, to work together to address issues facing our region.

It has led to a focus on local issues and Government policies, and their impact, at the local place-based level.

Our priorities

Early in 2019, after hearing from hundreds of people from across our community, the Partnership published its first Outcomes Roadmap – a summary of the key, long-term strategic areas of focus for the Partnership moving forward.

The Roadmap is a summary of where the Partnership is looking to make a real difference.

The long-term outcomes the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership is striving to achieve are:

- **Transport** – Communities and industries connected to each other and major service centres
- **Health and wellbeing** – Healthy and engaged communities – a great place to grow up and grow old
- **Economic development** – Prosperous and innovative economy growing our key and emerging sectors
- **Education and skills** – 21st century education for future generations and lifelong learning for all
- **Digital economy** – Leading the way in digital inclusion, innovation and entrepreneurship
- **Climate change and renewable energy** – Renewable energy future protecting our natural environment and delivering community benefits
What difference is the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership making on the ground?

The Ovens Murray Regional Partnership has been involved in driving projects across our region.

This map shows a small selection of initiatives with which the Partnership is involved.

**The Hume Region Renewable Energy Roadmap:** This was launched in August 2019. Developed for the Ovens Murray and Goulburn Partnerships by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Hume Region, following consultation with over 1,000 members of the community, the roadmap outlines what a future sustainable, renewable energy landscape could look like for the region and identifies some of the area’s key renewable opportunities.

**Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing iconic walking trail:** This project received funding in Budget 2018/19. Planning is now underway, led by Parks Victoria. Also in the region, the Partnership heard from the community at the 2017 Assembly about interest in reactivating tourism at Mt Buffalo. Following this, the Victorian Government provided funding to the Alpine Shire Council to undertake a business case assessment. A number of options are suggested including opening part of the Mt Buffalo Chalet as a cafe.

**Wodonga Business Innovation Hub:** Work is progressing on establishing the Wodonga Business Innovation Hub which received $300,000 in Budget 2018/19 and will develop a local network around both virtual and physical co-working spaces, where talented local people gather to share learning, drive ideas, solve problems and contribute to building the 21st Century economy.

**Cycle tourism in the North East:** The Partnership has been involved in developing cycle tourism in the North East. Following the announcement of $12 million in the 2017/18 Budget, the Ride High Country (Stage 1) initiative is now well underway, including the Beechworth to Yackandandah trail extension; a marketing campaign; private sector activation; and enhancements to the existing Murray to Mountains trail.

**Wodonga Digital Hub:** The Partnership has been influential in securing funding for the Wodonga Digital Hub, which received $300,000 in Budget 2018/19 and recently opened for business at the Wodonga Library site. The Wodonga Digital Hub will connect local residents with advancing technology and create a digital skills bank for the community.

**Wangaratta Digital Hub:** The Partnership has been influential in securing funding for the Wangaratta Digital Hub which received $300,000 in Budget 2018/19 and recently opened for business at the Wangaratta Library site. The Wangaratta Digital Hub will connect local residents with advancing technology and create a digital skills bank for the community.

**The Ovens Murray Digital Plan:** The Partnership has been working with the Victorian Government on the development of the Ovens Murray Digital Plan. The final plan will identify key barriers to digital inclusion; infrastructure, supply and service demand patterns and requirements; unmet digital needs and potential solutions, as well as priority digital projects for the Ovens Murray region.

**North East Rail Improvements:** The Partnership has played an active role in advocating for passenger rail improvements on the North East Line, which is now undergoing a $235 million upgrade. The Partnership has been working with the Australian Rail Track Corporation to keep the Ovens Murray community updated on the progress of the track upgrade and with Transport for Victoria as it progresses preparation to deploy new standard gauge VLocity trains on the line and seeks to deliver the best possible outcomes for passenger rail users.
Showcasing Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the North East

Establishing the Ovens Murray region as a leader in digital innovation and entrepreneurship is a high priority for the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership.

The region already has strong digital innovation foundations, attracting people from diverse backgrounds, who are establishing e-businesses, entrepreneurial collaborations and digital learning opportunities across the region.

In early 2019, the Partnership launched a series of short videos, and written case studies, to showcase some of these national and international digital success stories as a way of inspiring others in, and to, the region.

The videos were launched at an event in Wangaratta and widely shared through social media.

Among the stories told is that of a young couple who relocated to Bright, in part for the lifestyle, and who went on to establish an e-business selling exercise tights that combine active wear and joint support.

Physiotherapist Phebe Liston was able to call on husband Scott’s graphic design skills to come up with Articfit tights which have since sold to customers in Queensland, New Zealand and Macau.

“We moved here to start the business because of the lower overheads and the lifestyle,” explains Phebe. “In Melbourne we were right in the hub of the city and sick of driving to go riding. Now I work two days at the physio clinic in which I am a partner and on the other days, if it’s good weather, we can decide to go skiing or do something else, and then work on the business later and into the night.”

Also featured in the videos is a company, based on a Benalla farm, selling high end garments to the world and a Wangaratta business which controlled Gold Coast transport services during the Commonwealth Games.

A former jewellery shop in Wangaratta, which has been turned into a co-working space with great digital infrastructure, a high tech clientele and Get Shit Done! nights, also featured, along with four educators from the North East, whose concerns about ensuring their students were digitally included, has resulted in students from one Wangaratta school taking on the world in robotics – and winning.

“People’s innovation journeys are amazing,” explains Irene Grant, Chair of the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership.

“These case studies unearth incredible national and international success stories in our region. They highlight how people choose to live here for the lifestyle and continue to develop their tech interests and businesses from our region.”

To view the videos and read the case studies in full, go to https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/regional-partnerships/ovens-murray/projects#digital-innovation
Next steps

With clear long-term priorities identified in the Outcomes Roadmap, the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership is now entering a new phase.

The Partnership will continue much of its existing work, including developing its Digital Plan, ongoing conversations with community members and interest groups, and advocating to get results that matter to the region.

Over the next year, rather than holding a large-scale Regional Assembly as in previous years, the Partnership will undertake more focused, deep-dive engagements with key stakeholders in a small number of priority areas.

These areas will be:

- Strengthening health and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable young people
- Passenger rail user amenity and
- Sustainability and growth opportunities in communities outside major regional centres.

Each matches with the Partnership’s long term priorities. These engagements will bring together the key players from our region, and elsewhere, to understand the issues and how they affect Ovens Murray.

It will lead to further focusing of effort to enable real change on the ground.

Who we are and how to find us

The Ovens Murray Regional Partnership is one of nine Regional Partnerships working across the state. Each was established by the Victorian Government in 2016.

The Partnership has been led since its inception by Irene Grant, who has extensive local government experience as an elected representative and government appointed Administrator, is an experienced board member and committed advocate for “provincial living”.

Joining her on the Partnership are seven community and business members, as well as the CEOs of each of the Ovens Murray Local Government Areas (LGAs), a Victorian Government Deputy Secretary, and a representative of Regional Development Australia (RDA), ensuring local, state and Commonwealth Government involvement in the Partnership.