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Decade-long analysis finds North-East Victoria received about 48 per cent less infrastructure funding per person than selected regional centres.

Conservative project-by-project count identifies an infrastructure gap of at least $464 million after including Victoria's full $225 million Albury–Wodonga hospital commitment; the Government's broader Geelong schools figure indicates the gap may be around $550 million

An analysis of major Victorian Government infrastructure projects **completed or committed over the decade from 2016-17 to 2025-26** has identified a substantial funding disparity between combined Benambra and Ovens Valley and selected major regional centres.

The selected comparators are **Shepparton, Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong**. They were chosen because they are the regional centres closest to the North-East in scale, service role and common public comparison - not to create a definitive statewide ranking of every rural electorate.

$512.3m **North-East total**	**$3,937** **per resident**	**48%** **below selected benchmark**

Benambra and Ovens Valley Electorates together received approximately **$512.3 million** in identifiable major state infrastructure, equivalent to **$3,937 per resident**. Across the four selected regional-centre comparators, the conservative population-weighted rate was approximately **$7,500 per resident**.

At the verified comparator rate, the North-East would have received approximately **$975.9 million** rather than $512.3 million — a comparator-based gap of at least **$463.6 million**.

Graham Jenkin, Chief Executive Officer of **Business Wodonga**, said the figures should prompt a constructive examination of regional equity rather than a party-political argument.

> *"This is not a cynical political exercise, and it is not an argument that infrastructure should be allocated by population alone. It is a transparent snapshot intended to encourage a serious discussion about equity within regional Victoria."*

> *"Different regional centres perform different roles and have different needs. Even allowing for those differences, a per-capita disparity of this magnitude is difficult to explain and deserves a clear response."*

A selected regional comparison - not an apples-for-apples claim

Infrastructure is not, and should not be, distributed solely according to population. Major hospitals serve wide catchments, some cities host state institutions, and different regions face different transport, industry and service pressures.

The analysis therefore does not claim the five regions are identical. It asks a narrower question: **even allowing for different regional roles, is the scale and breadth of investment in the North-East broadly equitable?** The snapshot suggests it is not.

Regional infrastructure comparison

Region	Population	Major state infrastructure	Per resident	Compared with North-East
Shepparton	74,598	At least $717.6m	At least $9,620	$205.4m more in total; 2.4x per resident
Ballarat electorates	130,294	$1.167bn	$8,956	$654.7m more; 2.3x per resident
Bendigo electorates	135,874	$1.124bn	$8,271	$611.5m more; 2.1x per resident
Geelong regional-city group	301,366	At least $1.808bn	At least $5,998	About 52% more per resident
Benambra and Ovens Valley	**130,116**	**$512.3m**	**$3,937**	**North-East result**

The like-for-like population comparison: Ballarat

Benambra and Ovens Valley had a combined 2021 population of **130,116**. The two Ballarat electorates had **130,294** - a difference of only 178 people. Yet Ballarat received approximately **$654.7 million more** in identified infrastructure and about **2.3 times as much per resident**.

Smaller Shepparton received more in absolute dollars.

Shepparton had about **55,500 fewer residents** than the combined North-East, yet received at least **$205.4 million more in total** and about 2.4 times as much per resident.

Bendigo and Geelong also remained ahead

Bendigo had only around 5,800 more residents than Benambra and Ovens Valley but received approximately **$611.5 million more**. Geelong is much larger, but after adding individually verified school projects its conservative per-capita result was still about **52 per cent higher** than the North-East result.

> *"The question is not why Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton or Geelong received investment. Those communities need and deserve strong infrastructure. The question is whether the North-East has been supported to build and secure a comparable pipeline."*

Hospital funding is fully included

The analysis gives the North-East full recognition for its major hospital commitments. The combined Benambra-Ovens Valley total includes:

Victoria's full $225 million commitment to the Albury-Wodonga Regional Hospital;

$22.9 million for the Wangaratta Hospital redevelopment; and

Victoria's approximately $6 million contribution to the Albury Hospital emergency department and short-stay redevelopment.

Major hospital projects are also included for the comparator regions, including the $630 million Bendigo Hospital, the $655 million Ballarat Base Hospital redevelopment, the $229.3 million Goulburn Valley Health hospital redevelopment, a **separate** over $160 million acute and community mental-health commitment in Shepparton, and the Barwon Women's and Children's project in Geelong. Official records show the $229.3 million redevelopment reached its final funding envelope in 2019, while the mental-health allocation was announced separately in the 2022–23 Budget.

> *"The full $225 million Victorian commitment to the Albury–Wodonga hospital has been counted. The North-East still sits about 48 per cent below the selected regional benchmark, which makes the disparity harder — not easier — to dismiss."*

Were there projects ready to fund?

A government or journalist may reasonably ask whether North-East projects had completed business cases, secured land, planning approvals and delivery capacity. The analysis does not answer that question, and it does not assume that every difference is the result of political preference.

Possible explanations include **project readiness, the quality of business cases, local and regional advocacy, departmental priorities, the design of statewide programs, planning capacity and broader government policy choices**. Further evidence would be needed to determine the relative importance of each factor.

However, if a persistent lack of shovel-ready projects is part of the explanation, that raises another important question: **why was a region of approximately 130,000 people not supported to develop a stronger investment-ready pipeline?**

> *"Project readiness should not end the discussion. If the North-East lacked sufficiently developed proposals, the Government should explain what planning, business-case and agency support was provided to help the region compete fairly."*

What the snapshot does - and does not - prove

The analysis demonstrates a material difference in identifiable major infrastructure completed or committed during the decade. It does not establish the cause of that difference, prove improper political motive, or claim that population should be the sole funding formula.

It is also not a complete statewide ranking. Mildura, Warrnambool, Gippsland and other regional areas were not included in this first comparison. The scope was deliberately limited to Shepparton, Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong because they are the regional centres most closely associated with the North-East as practical comparators of scale and regional-service function.

> *"This is a snapshot designed to encourage discussion about equity within the regions, not a cynical attempt to diminish investment in other communities or predetermine why the disparity exists."*

What is included - and what is not

The core figures are deliberately bounded so the same rules can be applied across all five comparison areas.

Included in the core comparison	Not included in the core comparison
• Major Victorian Government projects completed, opened or operational between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2026. • Firm state capital commitments made during the decade, even where completion occurs later. • Major hospital and mental-health infrastructure. • Published Victorian contributions and state-backed project values. • Projects generally involving about $10 million or more in identifiable state investment, with limited exceptions for major cross-border or health projects.	• Commonwealth, NSW Government, council, private and philanthropic contributions where they can be separated. • Routine maintenance, recurrent service funding and most smaller grants. • Statewide or multi-region programs without a reliable local allocation. • Cancelled, abandoned or unfunded proposals. • Projects whose state contribution, timing or local share could not be verified. • State-owned water-corporation programs in the core table, because equivalent programs were not assembled consistently for every comparator.

Geelong school infrastructure strengthens the finding

Measure	Verified project register	Government-reported broader scenario
Geelong school infrastructure	**$153.289m individually verified and added**	"Almost $600m" stated on 21 August 2026
Geelong infrastructure total	**At least $1.808bn**	Approximately $2.24–$2.25bn
Geelong funding per resident	**At least $5,998**	Approximately $7,450–$7,480
North-East comparison	**About 48% below; at least $464m gap**	Around 52% below; about $552m–$554m gap

On 21 August 2026, the Victorian Government said it had invested "almost $600 million" in school infrastructure in Geelong. The headline result above uses only **$153.289 million of school projects that can presently be verified line by line**. The broader Government figure is shown separately because no project schedule, exact total, time period or geographic definition accompanied the aggregate claim.

> *"The Government's own Geelong schools figure reinforces the scale of the disparity. We have used only the projects we can verify line by line in the headline result; using the broader official figure would widen the gap further."*

Water-infrastructure sensitivity does not remove the disparity

The North East Water program is major infrastructure and is shown separately so its effect is transparent. If the full $103.9 million Wodonga-Wangaratta water and sewer package were added to the North-East total:

- the combined total would rise from $512.3 million to approximately $616.2 million;
- funding per resident would rise from $3,937 to approximately $4,736;
- the North-East would still remain about 37 per cent below the selected comparator benchmark; and
- the comparator-based gap would remain approximately $360 million.

This sensitivity should not be merged into the core result unless equivalent water-corporation investment is also assembled for every comparator region.

Call for transparency and an investment-ready North-East pipeline

Business Wodonga is calling on the Victorian Government to:

1. publish a transparent breakdown of major capital investment by regional electorate and local government area, including the treatment of state-owned corporations;

2. explain the factors behind the North-East disparity, including the role of business-case readiness, agency priorities and program design;

3. fund the planning, business cases and early works needed to develop a credible pipeline of investment-ready North-East projects;

4. undertake an independent regional infrastructure-needs and funding-equity assessment; and

5. establish a funded, long-term infrastructure plan for Benambra, Ovens Valley and the wider North-East.

> *"The Government should explain the disparity and, if project readiness has been a constraint, work with councils, agencies and regional institutions to build the pipeline needed to close it."*

Methodology note

The analysis covers identifiable major Victorian Government infrastructure projects that were either completed, opened or became operational between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2026, or were firmly committed by the Victorian Government during that period. A project meeting both tests is counted once.

The comparison uses published Victorian contributions and state-backed project values, and 2021 State Electoral Division populations as a common midpoint denominator. It is a project-register comparison, not an audited statement of cash expenditure by electorate.

Shepparton and Geelong are minimum estimates because some official project descriptions use the words "more than" or "over". The Shepparton $229.3 million hospital redevelopment and over $160 million mental-health allocation have been checked as separate commitments. The central Geelong result includes $153.289 million in individually verified school projects, while the Government's broader "almost $600 million" schools claim is shown as a sensitivity. The estimated $463.6 million gap is a population-adjusted comparator, not an audited expenditure ledger. A detailed project register and source list are available separately.

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