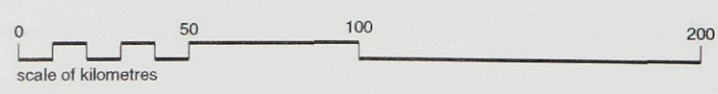
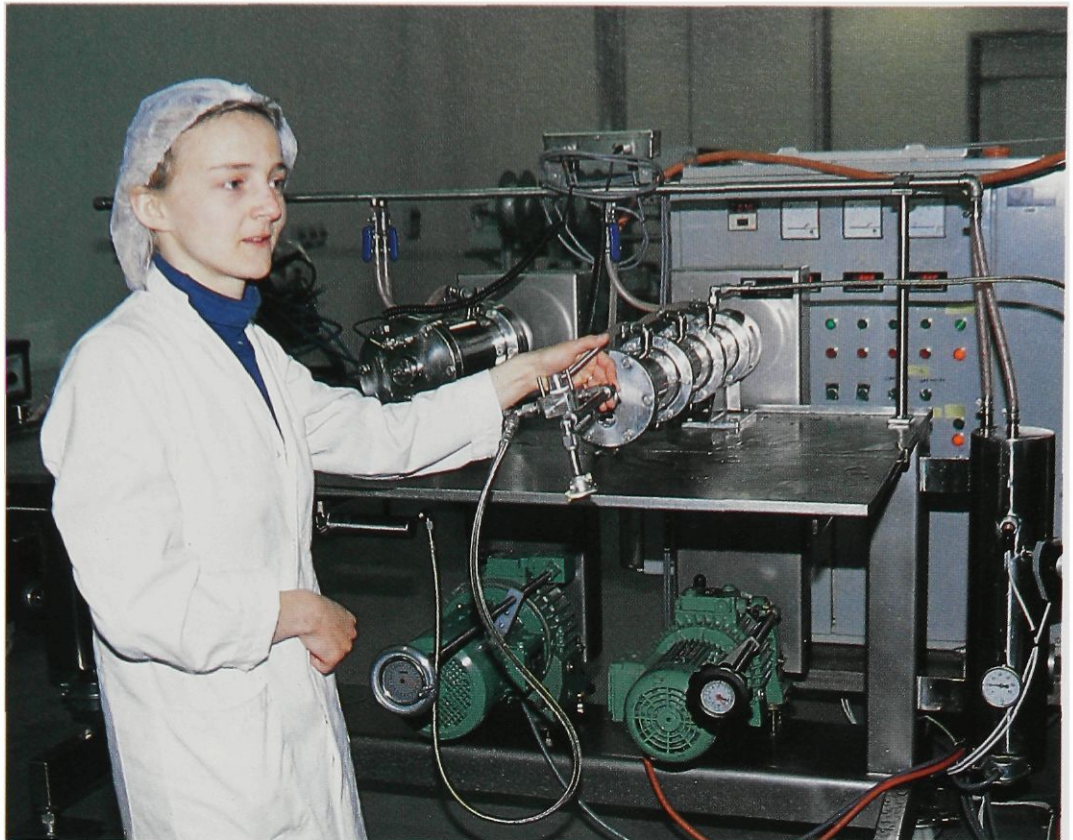


Figure 5 - MELBOURNE AND NEIGHBOURING REGIONAL CENTRES

- Bendigo Colac Regional centre, other major centre
- Melbourne's existing urban area
- Regional links



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Victoria is already recognised throughout the Asia-Pacific region as a centre for clean food production. The Werribee food technology precinct symbolises the synergy between country and city that has made this possible.

- supporting effective regional networks involving all spheres of government and all sections of the community to promote economic development
- encouraging the development of tourism infrastructure.

The establishment of the Australian Food Industry Science Centre at Werribee and the development of the Werribee agricultural and food technology precinct are central elements in the Government's strategy to achieve agriculture-based growth.

Improving the efficiency of infrastructure

With more of Victoria's agrifood resources being processed close to their place of origin, and with more of the resulting products destined for export, efficient regional infrastructure is critical to the State's economic well-being.

It is especially important that regional transport networks are integrated with interstate highways and railways, the Port of Melbourne, regional ports and Melbourne Airport to expedite the movement of finished goods from country Victoria to national and international markets. The Victorian Government will strengthen transport links by:

- increasing road capacities and upgrading strategic road routes between Melbourne and regional Victoria
- evaluating the advantages of standardising rail gauges.

The Government has already committed \$20 million to standardise rail gauges on the western grain lines to Yaapeet and Hopetoun and link them to the Port of Portland, and it is spending a third of Better Roads Victoria funds on rural road improvements. The *Linking Victoria* strategy currently being finalised will provide a framework for developing and managing the State's rural road network over the next ten years. Regional Victoria will also benefit from the



Improvements to the Calder Highway north-west of Melbourne.

progressive implementation of road, rail and air freight measures recommended in the *Freightway Melbourne* strategy.

While discussion of regional infrastructure often focuses on transport, water and energy are equally important. For example, a reliable supply of water is essential for food processing, and many energy-intensive resource processing operations require access to natural gas.

The rural water industry has been restructured over the last three years to create fewer, larger water authorities with solid financial and technical foundations. These authorities are now better able to satisfy the needs of both industry and the community.

Gascor continues to extend its regional distribution network. Over the last two years it has introduced or expanded natural gas supply to towns such as Cobden, Hamilton and Portland. Services will be extended to Horsham, Stawell, Ararat and Colac, and plans are being drawn up to supply the Murray Valley towns from Rutherglen to Cobram.

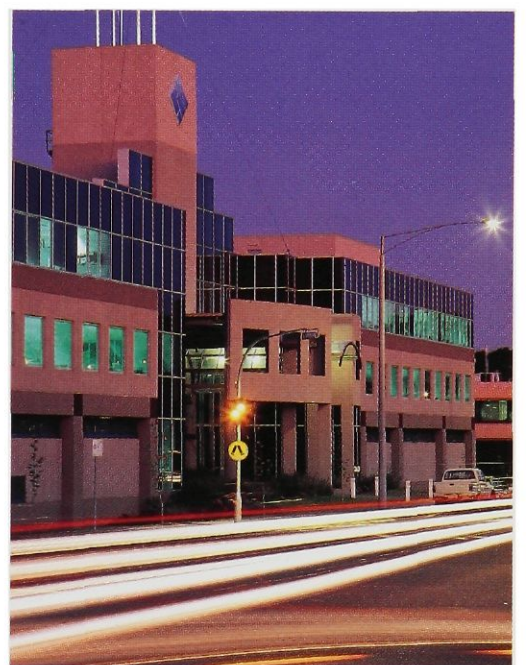
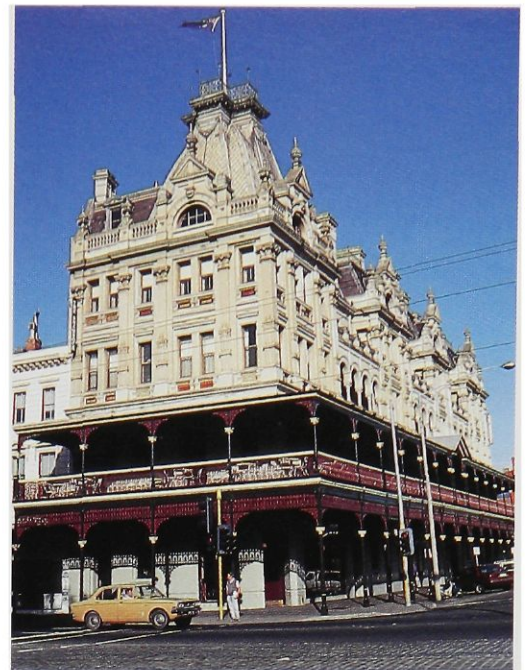
The need for local higher education facilities is also being addressed. Several regional centres now have well-established university campuses, and the Government is committed to increasing the availability of vocational training in areas with a specialised knowledge base or high growth potential.

Improving telecommunications linkages

Advances in telecommunications and information technologies are substantially overcoming the problems of distance associated with non-metropolitan locations, and may ultimately redefine the traditional relationship between city and country.

As well as facilitating the establishment of other industries – especially service industries – the information technology sector is a significant employer and wealth generator in its own right. Information technology businesses can be readily located in smaller cities, and regional centres have made a major contribution to the growth of this sector in Victoria. Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and the La Trobe Valley all have established strengths in information technology, which they have been able to develop by exploiting state-of-the-art telecommunications links with Melbourne.

The viability of the information technology sector depends on maintaining and refining these links. The Victorian Government will work with the regions and the Commonwealth to ensure that telecommunications providers continue to improve telecommunications links across Victoria – not least by attracting industries and activities which make heavy use of telecommunications, thereby generating levels of demand that will justify further investment by telecommunications providers.



Melbourne isn't Victoria's only major urban centre. Clockwise from right – Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, the La Trobe Valley.

Broadband technologies can also give regional centres readier access to metropolitan services. The teleradiology system used by the Royal Melbourne Hospital and St Vincent's Hospital – which can instantly transmit X-ray images to any doctor's surgery in the State without loss of quality – is one example.

The Government will continue to support the VICNET initiative with a view to giving all Victorians comparable access to the Internet and eliminating the telecommunications cost penalties associated with distance. All Victorian public libraries will be connected to VICNET by the end of 1996. The Government will also use existing satellite and Internet connections to expand curriculum options at rural schools.