Council Plan 2021–2025, Section 2.1.4 Lobby State and Federal governments to fund improved digital and telecommunications infrastructure.

Equitable digital and telecommunications infrastructure

The opportunity:

The struggle for internet speed, reliability and phone coverage in Strathbogie Shire's municipality is unacceptable.

Slow speeds, dropouts, congestion at peak usage times and no mobile signal are causing dissatisfaction and disparity.

In Strathbogie Shire, the expectations of the NBN have not been met. Service in some locations is better on the mobile network, but 3G is intermittent and 4G is missing in many places.

Businesses and farms are not served well by fixed wireless internet connections and often face restraints from satellite services. The need to meet the policy objectives of a universally available NBN in our rural community is urgent.

More than 20 per cent of our population works in Agriculture, which heavily relies on mandated online platforms, such as livestock management system record keeping, auctions to buy and sell stock as well as more innovative practices of remote security monitoring, farm mapping, security cameras, emergency communications and equipment research.

As the result of a collaboration with NBNCO, Strathbogie Shire Council seeks further rollouts of fixed broadband and fibre to the node connections.

*Cover image.
Hayley Purbrick,
Tahbilk Winery,
Nagambie*

*2. Sheep grazing in
prime lamb country,
Longwood*

*3. NBNCO Road Muster
truck demonstrating
the Sky Muster satellite
service*

*4. Mt Wombat
Telecommunications
Tower*

The benefits:

We believe telecommunications infrastructure is just as important as road, waste and utility services and the lack of this infrastructure and service providers makes rural districts uncompetitive in attracting commercial and residential investment, and at a disadvantage.

For local retailers, the EFTPOS machine internet reception wavers and peak internet usage times by school students cause slow and unreliable service.

Major event organisers of GoFish Nagambie Tournament, the Violet Town Market and the Euroa Music Festival face phone and internet congestion challenges which reduce participant satisfaction and the likelihood of them returning or providing positive feedback.

We need to ensure Strathbogie Shire residents, businesses and visitors receive the same level of connectivity capacity and service reliability as those in metropolitan Melbourne and our larger regional centres.

Without this, we will be left out of the digital race and miss out on economic development opportunities.

We know from lived experience that emergency resilience of rural communities is severely compromised during emergency events such as storm and fire events.

This is not a situation we accept.

The ask:

Improved infrastructure and service delivery through secured funding to meet community service expectations and needs that metropolitan-based residents enjoy as a right. Specifically:

One.

Build mobile phone towers in Mitchelton and Boho South

Two.

Provide fibre connections to the towns of Avenel and Violet Town as a Stage 1 response of a comprehensive roll out across the Shire

Three.

Eliminate mobile black spots in Strathbogie Shire

Profile:

Rob Jamieson is a Ruffy resident who has experienced poor telecommunications first-hand in personal life as well as business.

"In the agriculture industry the National Livestock Identification System is now entirely online. This means that rural farmers and business owners need reliable and efficient internet coverage to fulfill regulatory requirements such as biosecurity recording and online audits which are now mandated.

We need telecommunications infrastructure and services to support this reliance to:

• buy and sell stock online

• input agricultural requirements

• provide remote monitoring of irrigation, feed, water tanks and lightning trackers

• equipment research and maintenance

• security monitoring

• data analytics to track yields for spraying and fertiliser

• drones to monitor fencing and livestock

• emergency communications in fires, storms, floods and more.

None of this can be achieved with the current telecommunications infrastructure in Strathbogie Shire. We need accessible and reliable phone and internet service coverage."

Rob and the community experience slow internet speeds and intermittent coverage in the Ruffy Tablelands.

Rob Jamieson

Ruffy Community Action Group

Ruffy Community Action Group members from left: Edward Sprunt, Theo Lagarde, Rob Jamieson, Gerry Ginnivan, Darryl Otzen and Bill Eddy

"I use the internet to receive and pay my bills, access My Gov and other online services, for news updates and for connection to family and friends.

In business, as a farmer I need coverage in order to stay updated with industry standards and to access online banking, ATO portals, payroll systems and more..."