

Discussion Paper: Colac Visitor Servicing Review

May 2024 – Colac Otway Shire Council



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Gulidjan and Gadubanud people as the traditional custodians of the Colac Otway Region. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and Elders, past present and emerging. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to their traditional lands, which continue to be important to them today and into the future.

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Executive Summary

Colac Otway Shire Council (Council) commenced the Colac Visitor Servicing Review to identify a visitor servicing model for Colac which is sustainable in the long term and maximises information dispersal to visitors to increase visitor spend, length of stay and seasonal/geographical spread. Council partners with neighbouring Councils and the regional tourism board, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism (GORRT), to deliver visitor servicing, set regional strategic tourism objectives and curate a consistent visitor experience in the Great Ocean Road (GOR) region.

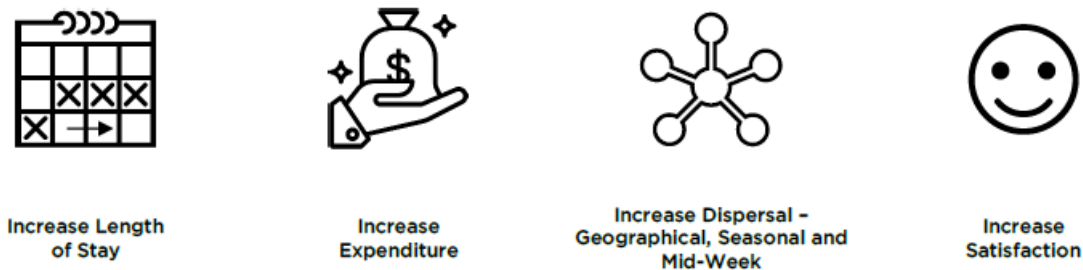


Figure 1 - Strategic Tourism Objectives for GOR Region.

Visitor servicing in Colac has historically been delivered primarily through a ‘bricks and mortar’ Visitor Information Centre (VIC). Since opening over three decades ago, only minor operating model changes have occurred including modifications to opening hours and staffing/volunteer levels. During this period, visitor behaviour and how visitors consume information before and during their trip has evolved and the opportunity exists to ensure future service delivery aligns with visitor demand.

Council delivered visitor servicing in Colac has been via a ‘passive’ model where the visitor is expected to seek out information services. Worldwide, destinations are trending away from ‘passive’ models towards ‘proactive’ models where the information is brought to where the visitor is. Destinations are also developing services to provide information throughout the visitor journey from the pre-visit inspiration and planning stage to the post-visit sharing stage. Through the passive approach Council is currently servicing approximately 0.6% of visitors through a ‘bricks and mortar’ VIC, so Council and the community need to consider if it should aim to service a much broader number of visitors.

The October 2019 Deloitte Access Economics report - Technology Disruptors in Tourism - observed *“The introduction of new technologies has disrupted and continues to disrupt the tourism industry in many ways. It has changed the way operators target travellers, it has challenged existing service offerings and is forcing a re-imagining of the visitor experience and the end-to-end visitor journey”*.

The visitor servicing landscape has transformed with visitors requiring different information and using alternate sources for that information during stages of their trip lifecycle. These market changes have primarily been driven through advances in technology and digital tools that provide increased access to information before the visitor enters the destination and whilst in-destination with more information available through a handheld device than can be included in any physical location. The advent of these digital tools allows a destination to considerably increase its influence on a visitor with the right tools when compared to traditional forms of visitor servicing.

In 2024, visitors are highly connected and digitally capable, tending to take on the planning themselves and seeking personalised, authentic experiences that give them deep connection and inspiration.

Destinations that successfully curate and guide the visitor experience carefully balance physical and digital servicing product development with a view to capturing the visitors imagination and distribute the right information, via the most appropriate medium at the point in the visitors journey which they require it. It should be noted that not all destinations are reviewing or changing how they service visitors, however successful destinations have moved to an enhanced digital-based visitor servicing approach supplemented by enhanced traditional forms including mobile VICs and unmanned smart touch screens.

This Discussion Paper provides an overview of the region and the role of tourism organisations and then focuses on how services are currently delivered in Colac. An evidence-based approach is used to formulate a robust picture of current service performance inclusive of visitor utilisation, expenditure and a comparison to other VICs along the GOR. The Discussion Paper also explores changes in visitor behaviour and how other places are adapting to a modern visitor economy. The Discussion Paper uses examples of success in other locations to provide multiple methods to service visitors that can be used to create a visitor servicing model.

Council acknowledges the history and community connection relating to the current ColacVIC building which was built by community volunteers and donations from local business. The building has adequately served the community as a visitor information centre over multiple decades. However, it is important when considering the future of visitor servicing to present a holistic view of how a visitor receives information and what has the greatest impact on influencing people's decision-making.

This Discussion Paper provides an important stage for local businesses and the community to provide feedback on the Colac Visitor Servicing Review and influence future visitor servicing model options prior to Council deciding on future direction. Local businesses and the community are requested to review this Discussion Paper in order to provide feedback through a further engagement process.

The Current Service

About Destination Colac

Colac is a town within the Colac Otway Shire located approximately two hours from Melbourne on the land of the Gulidjan and Gadubanud people being the main service centre for the region traditionally focusing on farming and forestry industries. For the visitor, there is a limited offering of things to do within the township, with the main attractions including Lake Colac, Colac Botanic Gardens, Colac's restaurants and cafés, Colac Golf Course and Racecourse and the Old Beechy Rail Trail. Colac's strategic tourism value comes from its location as a great vantage point being a natural gateway to explore the wider region being located on the doorstep of some of Victoria's most loved attractions including the Great Otway National Park and the Volcanic Lakes and Plains. In addition to holiday makers, Colac benefits from mid-week business tourism with its thriving industries and sporting visitation with multiple sports clubs regularly hosting large sporting tournaments.

Colac's ability to take advantage of its geographical location and business/sporting visitation is limited by the range and quality of accommodation offerings within the township. Relating to visitor servicing this impacts the economic benefit that visitor servicing can drive and may be one factor leading to most of Colac's visitors using it as a stopover on the way to a final destination as discussed in the 'ColacVIC Service Performance' section. The opportunity exists through information sharing to change visitors' perception of Colac from a short stop to a destination in its own right from which to explore the wider region. To achieve this, information will need to be provided to visitors during the dreaming and planning phase of their journey rather than in-destination.

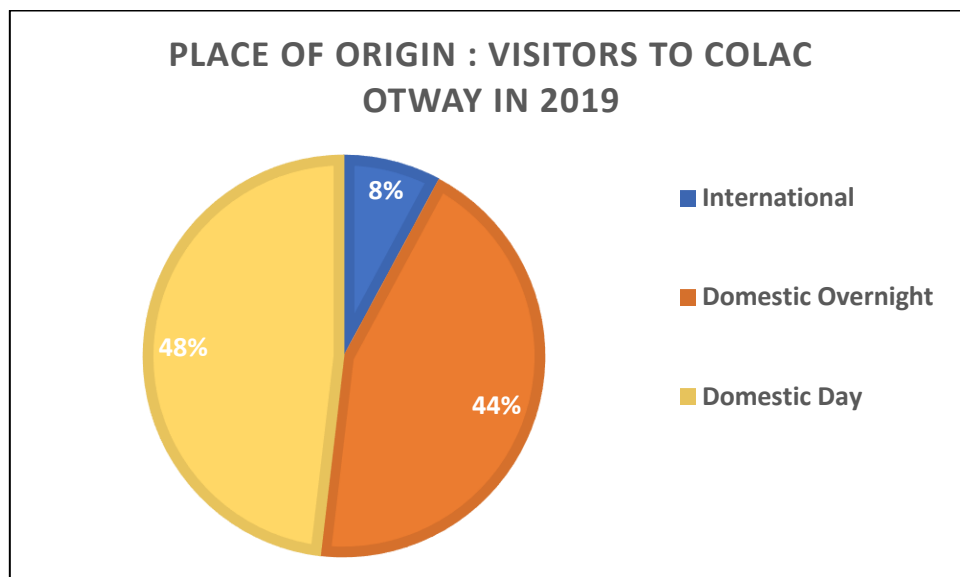


Figure 2 - Summary of visitor place of origin in Colac Otway, 2019

Until 2019 Tourism Research Australia prepared annual industry reports on tourism data and trends at a Local Government Authority (LGA) level. In 2019 there was a total of 1.02 million visitors to Colac

Otway Shire who spent a total of \$249 million whilst in-destination. Figure 2 and figure 3 represent where visitors came from and how much they spent.

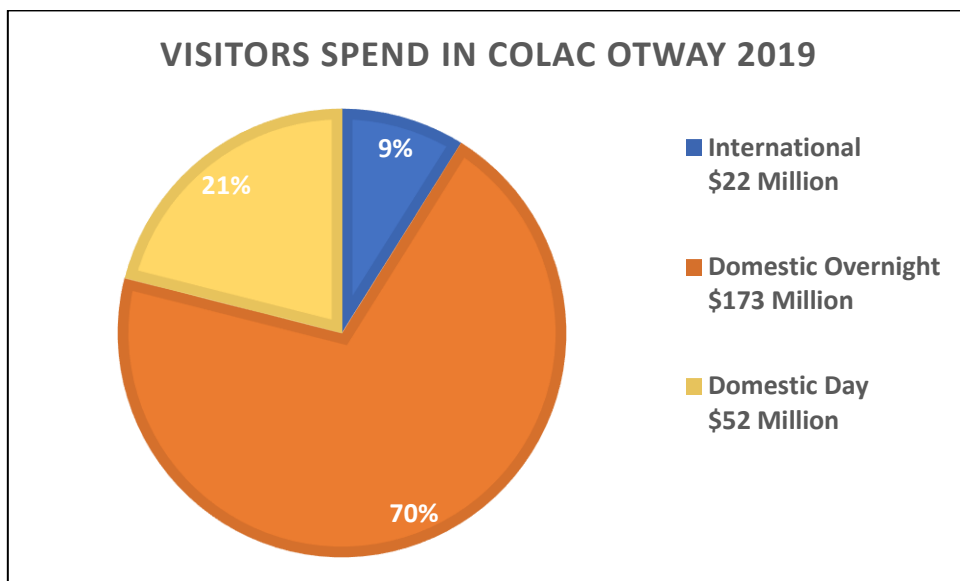


Figure 3 - Summary of total visitor spend by place of origin in Colac Otway, 2019

Domestic overnight visitors contributed 70% of total visitor spend whilst only making up 44% of visitor numbers whilst international visitors made up the smallest portion of visitor number and visitor spend. This data and *The Great Ocean Road Region* section demonstrates the volume of the day tripper market. Whilst the importance of this market is not discounted, to grow yield and stimulate economic growth there is a need to focus on initiatives that look to grow the overnight market. For Colac that means visitor servicing should target the visitor whilst planning their trip to sell the range of destination activities available and influence the visitor to stay more than one day.



The Great Ocean Road Region

The GOR region is one of 12 tourism regions in Victoria and extends from Torquay in the east to the South Australian border in the west. It is made up of six Local Government Areas (LGA's) including: Colac Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne, Surf Coast and Warrnambool. The region includes two of Australia's most iconic tourism products being the 12 Apostles and the Great Ocean Road. The region's tourism products are primarily centred on nature-based and water-based experiences.

In the GOR region, visitors are serviced through a network of 15 VICs, nine of which are Victorian Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) accredited. All the VIC's are overseen by Councils except for Cobden which is owned and ran by a community volunteer organisation without Council assistance. The *GOR Future of Visitor Servicing Report 2019* made the following observations regarding the regions VICs:

- The majority of accredited VICs are situated along the GOR touring route. This is indicative of the traditional visitor flow patterns and where the bulk of product is located.
- The in-land VICs tend to be non-accredited except for ColacVIC and Casterton VIC.
- The location of the bulk of the region's VICs is unsustainable as:
 - Many hinterland VICs struggle to achieve and/or maintain strong visitation.
 - Many VIC's are not aligned with visitor attractions.
 - High density pockets of VIC's meaning they compete for visitation.

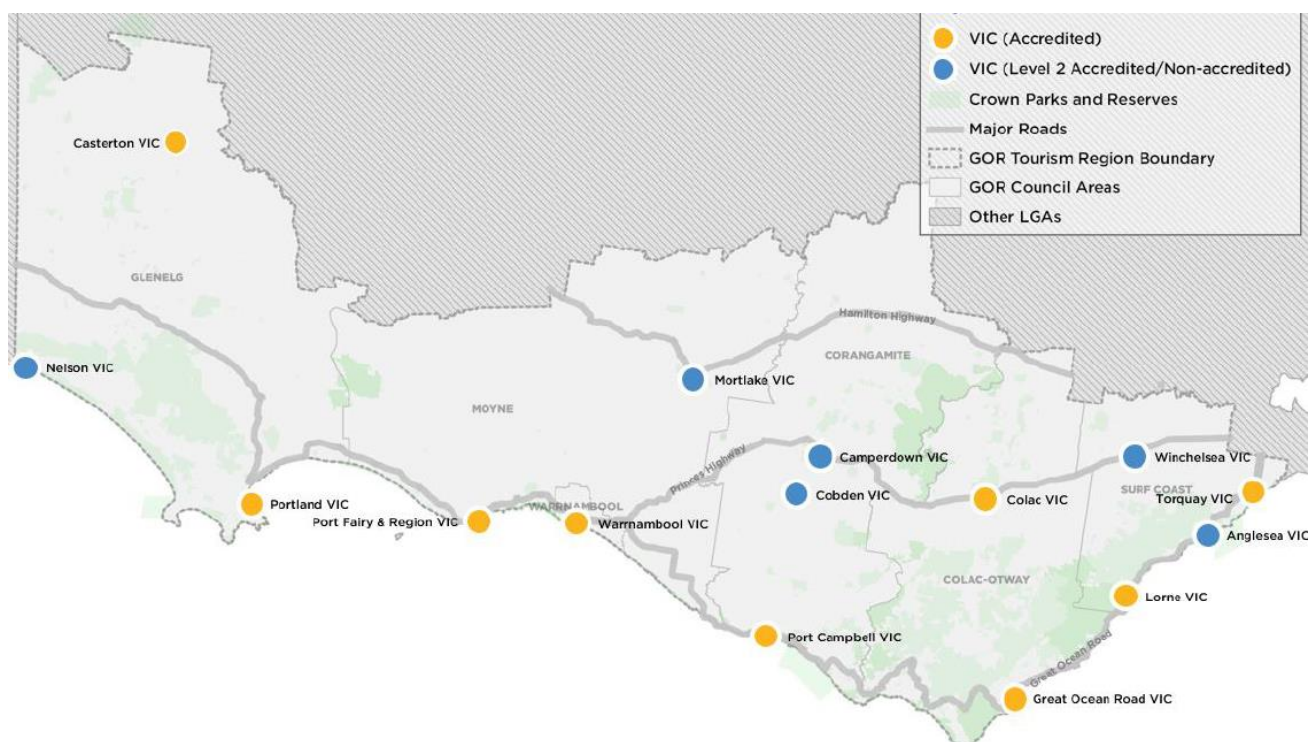


Figure 4 - VICs in the GOR Region (*GOR Future of Visitor Servicing Report 2019*)

Total visitation to the GOR region has continued to grow over the last 10 years from 4 million visitors a year in 2010 to 6 million in 2023 as per figure 5. Figure 5 also displays unique VIC visitation which is a GORRT consultant estimate of the number of individual visitors who visit one or more VIC within the GOR region.

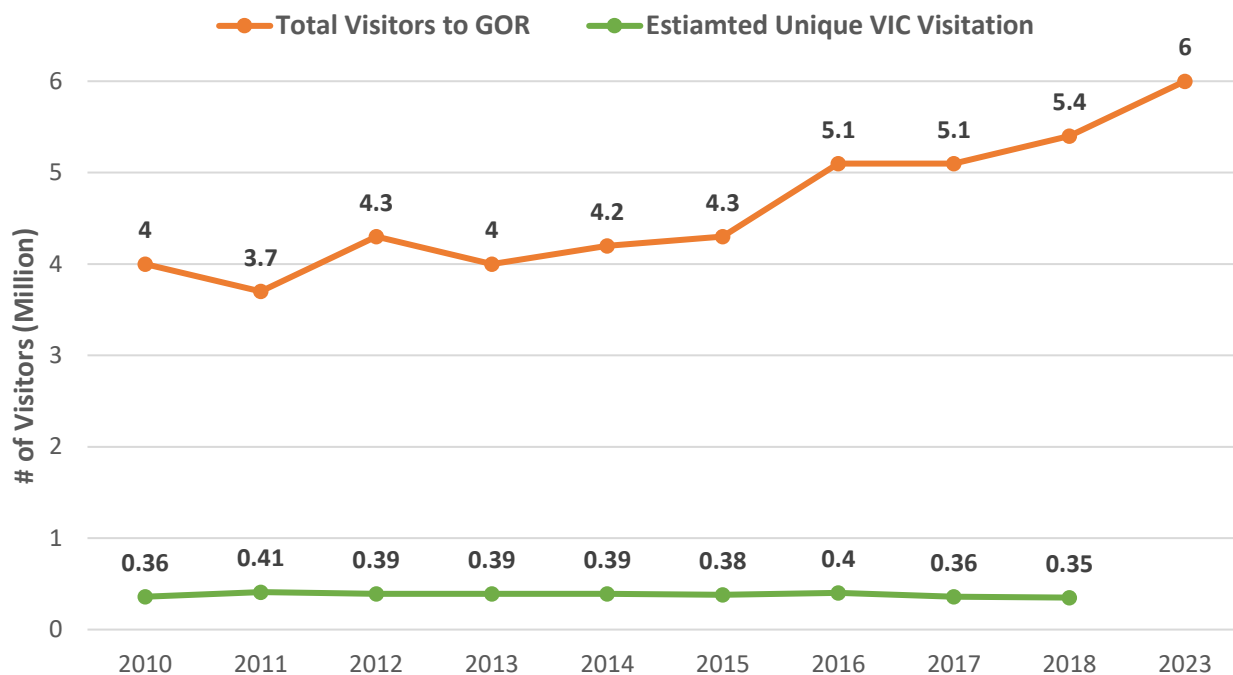


Figure 5 - Total Visitors to the GOR Region and Number of Unique Visitors to Visit a VIC (2010-2023)

Market penetration is the most common measure of VIC performance as it is difficult to estimate economic stimulus. Market penetration is calculated as the percentage of visitors to the GOR region (the market) that visit a VIC (penetration). Figure 6 - GOR Regional VIC Market Penetration 2010-2018 shows the GOR VIC penetration rate has declined from 9% in 2010 to 6.5% in 2018. This aligns with nation-wide trends which indicate that more visitors are choosing to utilise other forms of visitor information, particularly those available in the digital space.

VIC services are provided by Councils, and with such low market penetration there is the need to ensure the other 93.4% of visitors traveling to the region are effectively serviced. They may already be serviced through online information provided via GORRT websites and social media, third-party providers, and local businesses and attractions however this data has not been captured as a region.

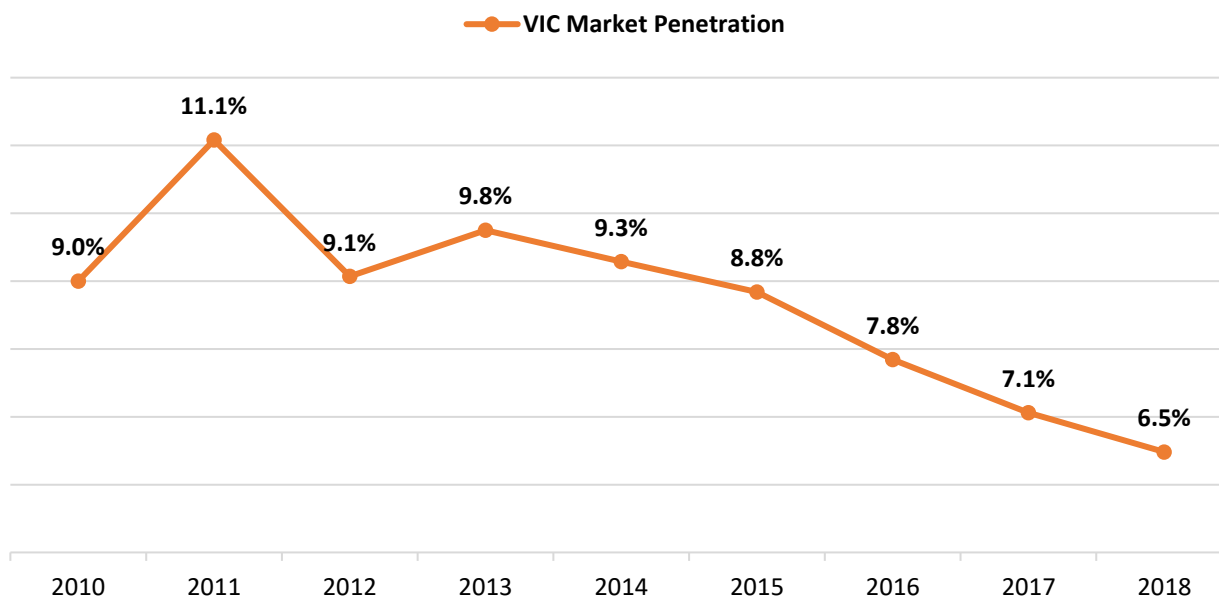


Figure 6 - GOR Regional VIC Market Penetration 2010-2018

In addition to VIC's, a variety of digital mediums including websites, online booking tools and social media are utilised to service visitors. The majority are managed by GORRT with some Councils having their own social media account.

Each of the GOR regional destinations has its own website which runs on the GORRT platform and are all linked to the overarching GOR regional website, branding and commercial partnerships. Commercial content on the websites is managed by GORRT and they showcase the GOR region as a collective proposition. The unique destination websites aim to provide a 'local flavour' to show the uniqueness of each destination. Whilst the region benefits from consistent branding, this doesn't allow individual destinations to truly curate their destination experience and brand and provide local content and recommendations. This concession is considered acceptable so individual destinations don't compete for visitors and rather showcase why a visitor should come back and explore other parts of the region. Website analytics support this showing strong referrals from the Visit Great Ocean Road website to destination websites. To note - GORRT is currently working with its Council partners on a digital improvement project which seeks to address challenges in the current website structure and create an improved platform for users and content managers.



Figure 7 - Homepage of GOR Regional Website

There are two destination websites within Colac Otway being Visit Otway's (visitotways.com) and Visit Apollo Bay (visitapollobay.com) which received 345,000 and 330,000 page views in 2023. Figure 8 - Annual Page Views to GOR and Colac Otway Destination Websites (2017-2023) also shows the regional website (visitgreateoceanroad.org.au) received 1.3 million page views over the same period. Whilst not every page view would result in a destination visit, the visitor interacts with these websites primarily in the planning stage of their trip meaning each interaction likely has a more significant impact on how long a visitor stays and how many attractions they explore than a visit to a bricks and mortar VIC.

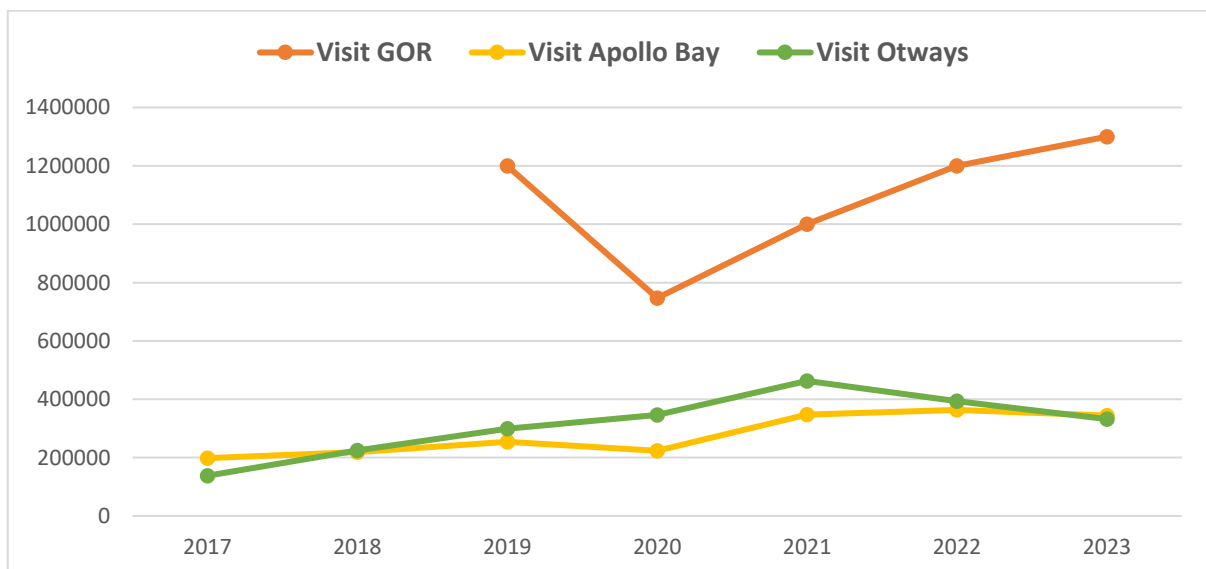


Figure 8 - Annual Page Views to GOR and Colac Otway Destination Websites (2017-2023)

The GOR Region also has various social media accounts including on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. GORRT manage regional accounts, with the Instagram account having 78,000 followers. Individual destination social media accounts are primarily managed by visitor information centres with each page ranging from 4,000 to 15,000 followers. Whilst follower numbers appear low compared to website interactions, digital marketing offers unparalleled opportunities to connect with a vast and diverse audience that was once out of reach through traditional marketing methods. Through sponsored posts and followers sharing content, these social media accounts can have significant reach to inspire visitors to consider visiting the GOR destinations.



Figure 9 - Visit Great Ocean Road Instagram Account

The Role of Tourism Organisations in Visitor Servicing

In Australia organisations exist at a national, state, regional and local level that guide development of the tourism sector and servicing visitors. The *GOR Future of Visitor Servicing Review 2019* provided a summary of how each of these organisations work to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits of the tourism industry for the state, region or LGA they represent. It notes there is often duplication of services and/or gaps resulting from confusion as to the responsibilities/roles of these organisations, particularly at a local and regional level.



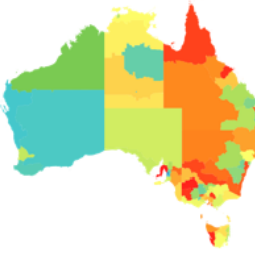
NATIONAL/FEDERAL

- Promote a country and its iconic and unique destinations to international markets
- Indicate where product gaps are for which states and territories and major industry players need to think about filling
- Create, coordinate and promote a national product database
- Identify major promotional campaigns and funding partners
- Identify iconic product, such as the GOR, as a core drive market product of national significance



STATE (STOs)

- Encourage interstate and international visitation to their specific state/territory
- A more dominant role in actively pursuing product development
- Development of a consistent branding and digital presence across their state/territory (recommend digital platforms, branding etc.)
- Set state tourism goals and objectives
- Funding available for promotional campaigns, often on a matching basis



REGIONAL (RTBs)

- On a more micro scale, ensure that stronger visitor flows and yield is able to be generated for a specific region which includes close liaison with relevant local government agencies
- Provision of a coordinated digital presence and platform for a region in alignment with state input and branding to offer consistency in messaging
- Responsibility to identify where product gaps exist and to work with local entities to find mechanisms to fill these gaps, and determine branding
- Delivery of industry training and upskilling programs
- Supporting applications for state and federal funding grants for tourism development projects



LOCAL (COUNCILS, LTOs & VICs)

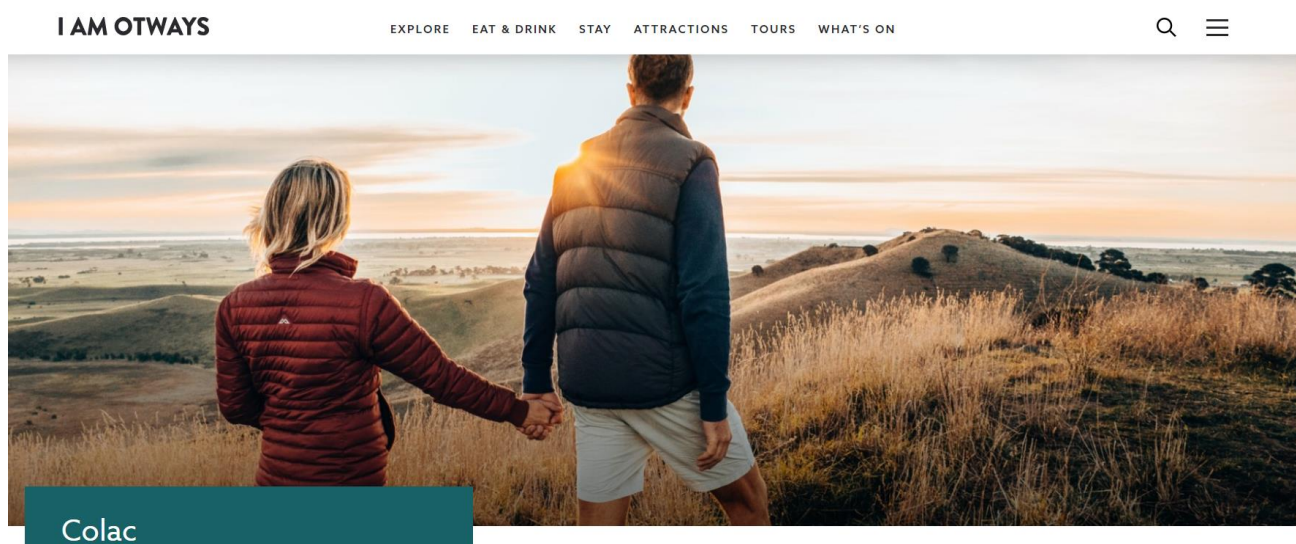
- Provision of local information to visitors through a variety of channels including visitor information centres, roving ambassadors, mobile visitor centres/kiosks and through providing content into regional digital platforms
- Rally support of local industry operators
- Develop grant funding applications
- Support the provision of tourism infrastructure requirements including way finding and signage, picnic areas, lay-bys, public toilets and other amenities

Figure 10 - The role of tourism organisations at different levels

Traditionally digital presence and online services are coordinated by a regional tourism organisation with content input from local organisations as demonstrated in *Figure 10 - The role of tourism organisations at different levels*. As visitor behaviour changes and in-destination servicing like ‘bricks and mortar’ VICs do not fully meet visitor needs, Councils need to consider if they should shift in-destination servicing to other methods or exit visitor servicing.

Colac VIC Service Performance

In Colac visitor servicing is provided through the provision of a ‘bricks and mortar’ VIC, known as ColacVIC. Staff at ColacVIC provide expert advice on what to do in Colac and surrounds and encourage visitors to visit additional attractions, stay longer and visit again. The *I Am Otway’s* destination website also includes a Colac destination page and some tourism signage is present within the township. Over previous years Colac has been included in multiple tourism marketing campaigns to inform potential visitors of local product including the *Volcanic Lakes and Plains* campaign and the *52 Great Weekends* campaign.



Whilst there are services provided outside of ColacVIC, there is no current Council management of these assets. Council makes an annual financial contribution to GORRT who currently manage the region’s websites, social media and marketing campaigns. Consequently, for the purpose of this Discussion Paper the focus will be on ColacVIC only as the current service.

Pre-Covid an internal review of the ColacVIC opening hours led to the reduction in opening hours in line with trends in visitation times in order to reduce costs. Currently ColacVIC is open 7 days a week from Christmas to 26 January and closes on Tuesday and Wednesdays for the remainder of the year. Prior to Covid, the facility experienced the lowest visitation numbers mid-week, a trend which has continued since re-opening. Current opening hours are displayed in *Table 1*.

	Christmas – 26 Jan	Rest of Year
Monday	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Tuesday	10am – 4pm	Closed
Wednesday	10am – 4pm	Closed
Thursday	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Friday	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Saturday	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm
Sunday	10am – 4pm	10am – 4pm

Table 1 - ColacVIC Current Opening Hours

Through 2023 staff manually recorded every ColacVIC patron to collect information for this review with a total of 3,554 patrons entering ColacVIC over the twelve-month period. Significant fluctuation in patron numbers were seen through the year with May to October being the quietest months.

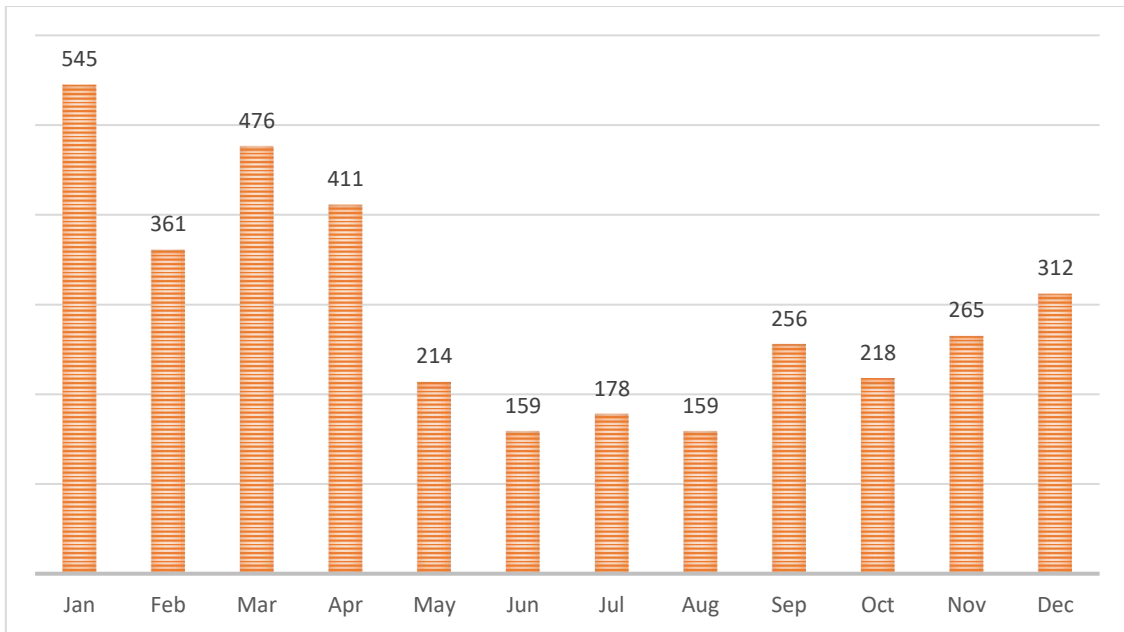


Figure 11 - Number of patrons to ColacVIC by month in (2023)

As ColacVIC was open a different number of days each month, figure 11 is useful to consider overall patronage, however figure 12 represents the true daily demand for the service by month.

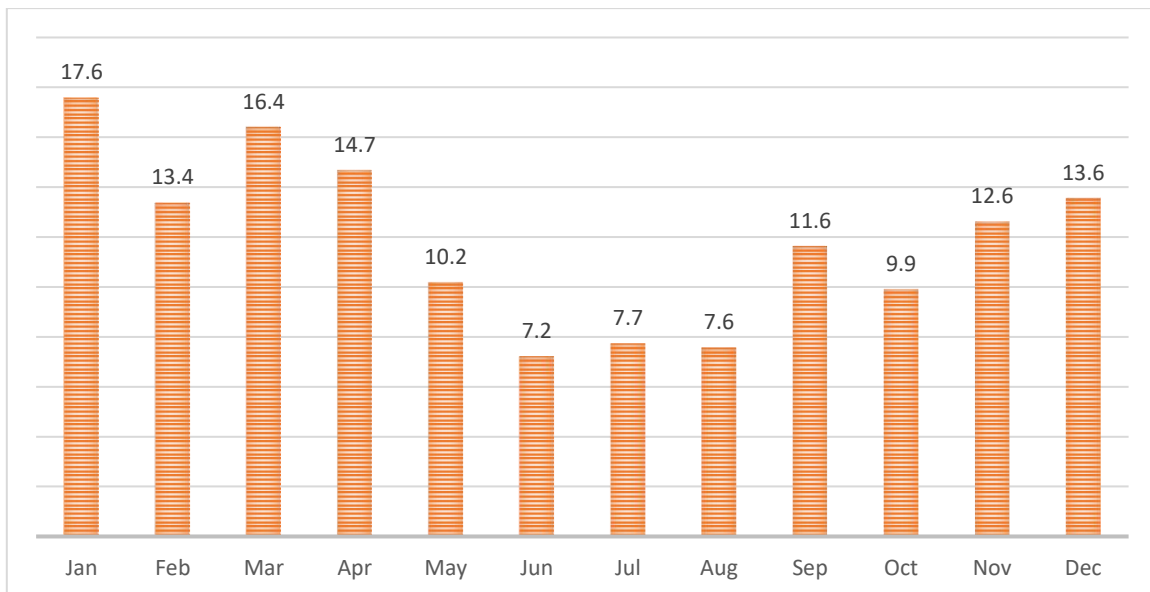


Figure 12 - Average number of patrons to ColacVIC per day (2023)

Tourism Research Australia no longer provides visitation data broken down by LGA, however in 2019 there was 1.02 million visitors to Colac Otway whilst there were 5.4 million visitors to the GOR region. Assuming the ratio of LGA to regional visitors remains constant, with 6 million visitors to the GOR region in 2023 it can be assumed there were 1.22 million visitors to Colac Otway over this period. A significant number of these would pass through Colac, however if only half do (600,000 visitors) then with 3,554 patrons to ColacVIC, the facilitates 2023 market penetration was approximately 0.6%. This raises the question, how should Council be servicing the other 99.4% of visitors?

Whilst the total number of patrons to ColacVIC in 2023 is indicative of performance, why visitors entered ColacVIC provides guidance on the facility’s economic stimulus potential. Figure 13 summarises why patrons entered ColacVIC in 2023. To note – the 13% of patrons who were allocated to ‘toilet’ used the facility as a public toilet rather than a VIC by having no interaction with VIC staff or visitor information displays.

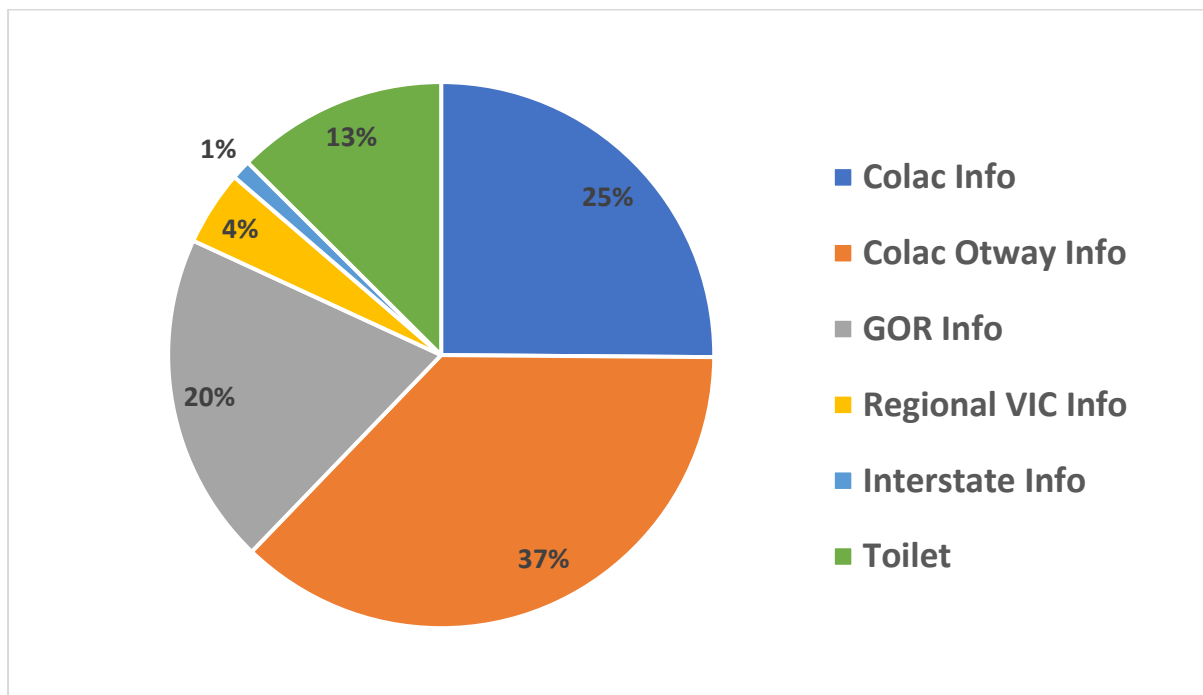


Figure 13 – Why Patrons Entered ColacVIC (2023)

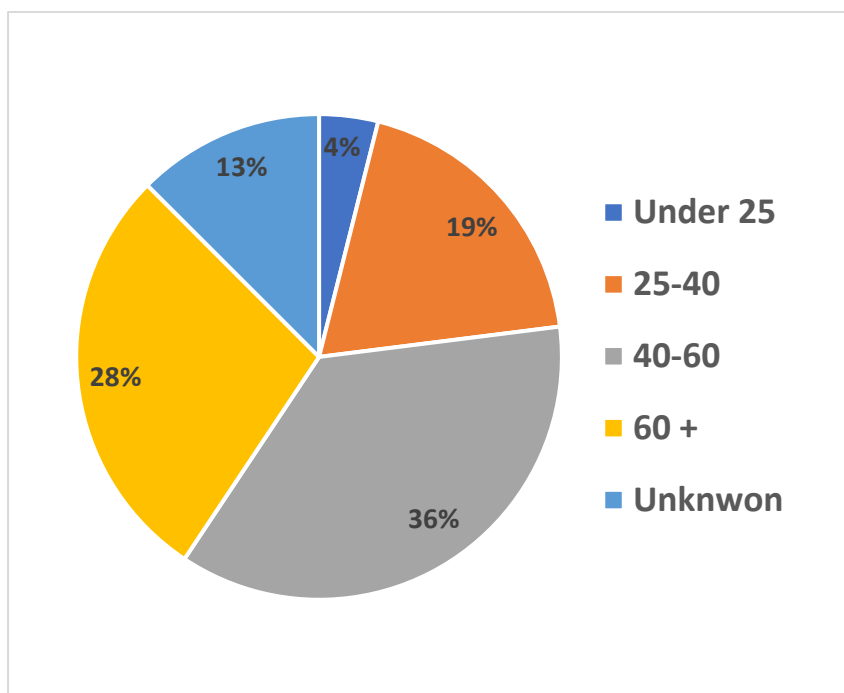
Whilst 62% of ColacVIC’s patrons in 2023 sought information about Colac or Colac Otway, most of these visitors were not staying in Colac Otway. Table 2 demonstrates that most patrons sought information on where to eat or what to do in Colac during a rest-stop towards their final destination. This significantly decreases the economic stimulus potential for ColacVIC as these patrons were already planning to stop for lunch or another activity. To create economic stimulus, ColacVIC staff have to on-sell other local products to encourage the visitor to visit again or stop longer next time.

VICs generally avoid estimating their economic stimulus due to the difficulty and availability of information leading to highly inaccurate estimates. However, using the data collected in 2023 and

average spend per visitor across the GOR over the same period, (which would be higher than the average spend per visitor in Colac due to Surf Coast Shire raising the average) we can estimate the maximum possible economic stimulus from ColacVIC in 2023 was \$53,000, though it is likely much lower.

ENQUIRY TYPE	EXAMPLE OF TYPICAL ENQUIRIES
COLAC INFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m driving to Port Fairy, where would you recommend having lunch in Colac?” • “We’re heading back to Melbourne, is there anywhere open for dinner in Colac?”
COLAC OTWAY INFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Can you recommend any walks in the Otways?” • “We are staying in Apollo Bay for 2 nights, what would you recommend doing in the area?”
GOR INFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What is the quickest way to the 12 Apostles?” • “Do you have a map of waterfalls around Torquay?” • “Do you have a map of the Timboon Rail Trail?”
REGIONAL VIC INFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Do you have a brochure on things to do in Ballarat?” • “Where would you stop on the way to Wilsons Prom??”
INTERSTATE INFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We’re driving to Adelaide, what would be the best route and where would you stop?”

Table 2 - Example Visitor Enquiries at ColacVIC



Visitors to ColacVIC tend to be in the over 40 or over 60 years old age group as displayed in Figure 14. Only 24% of visitors were under 40 years old in 2023 demonstrating the trend experienced across the industry of visitors seeking information pre-trip and through digital mediums. These trends are adopted earlier by younger age groups hence the demographic profile in Figure 14. It is important to consider how all demographics are serviced in future visitor service provision.

Figure 14 - Average Age of Patrons to ColacVIC (2023)

To continue operating ColacVIC in the 2024-25 financial year under the current operating model with trained staff would cost Council \$122,000 per annum. This figure does not include corporate overheads, asset renewal or asset depreciation and assumes staff and resources at ColacVIC are managed from the Great Ocean Road Visitor Information Centre (GORVIC) in Apollo Bay.

Historically there was a small cohort of dedicated volunteers to ColacVIC, who shared local knowledge and experience. When ColacVIC first opened it was 100% volunteer run and over time volunteer capacity reduced leading to Council staff initially coordinating the facility before fully staffing it. Assuming volunteer capacity existed to consistently operate ColacVIC, it would cost Council approximately \$66,000 per annum to run the facility excluding overheads, asset renewal or asset depreciation. This estimate is provided for comparison purposes, but it is not anticipated volunteer capacity exists to consistently operate ColacVIC under the current model year-round, plus historically the lowest volunteer capacity existed over Jan/Feb when there is the highest service demand.

In summary, ColacVIC offers highly experienced staff who help guide patrons on their visit to the region, but the Centre's market penetration is extremely low (0.6%) meaning it doesn't service most visitors to Colac. To continue operating ColacVIC will cost Council \$122,000 per annum in operational costs whilst creating an estimated economic stimulus of less than \$53,000 per annum.



Strategic Context

Literature Review

Local, Regional and State/National strategies, studies and reports helped to provide a baseline for this discussion paper. Local, regional and state strategies have consensus on the need to ensure information services provide information where and when the visitor needs it.

Visit Victoria summarised their visitor servicing objectives as:

Our goal is to deliver high quality, connected and personalised visitor servicing when and where the visitor needs it. Together we will:

- *Ensure visitor servicing is customer centric, high quality, on-brand and streamlined across in-person and online touch points*
- *Collaborate on visitor servicing approaches and solutions to ensure current and future visitor needs are met and exceeded*
- *Tailor training and skills for the visitor economy workforce to ensure positive visitor experiences, reinforce demand and inspire return visits.*

SOURCE	PLAN/STRATEGY
FEDERAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 2030 Strategy
STATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan • Experience Victoria 2033 • Victorian Accredited Visitor Information Servicing Guidelines 2018 • VIC Futures Report 2016
REGIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOR Future of Visitor Servicing Review 2019 • Strategic Master Plan For The Great Ocean Road Regional Visitor Economy 2015-2025 • The Visitor Economy Master Plan for the GOR Region 2020-2030 • Great Ocean Road Visitor Engagement Strategy 2016
LOCAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colac Otway Economic Development Strategy 2019-2024 • Colac Destination Action Plan 2020-2025 • Apollo Bay Destination Action Plan 2018-2020 • Otway Coast Hamlets Destination Action Plan 2017-2020 • Volcanic Lakes and Plains of Corangamite Shire Destination Action Plan 2016-2019

Table 3 - Literature Review Sources

Local Business & Community Survey

In 2023, Council undertook local business and community consultation via a survey which sought to understand visitor servicing views as a baseline. The survey focused on the following topics:

- The importance of visitors to local business.
- Methods local businesses use to attract visitors.
- To maximise the benefit of visitor servicing, what visitor services should be provided at different stages of the visitor journey.

The survey received 165 interactions with 30 local businesses and 82 community members completing the full survey. Interestingly, feedback differed significantly for local businesses compared to community members.

Local businesses prioritised servicing visitors whilst they plan their trip providing information through social media and destination websites, with in-destination servicing primarily being through directional signage. Conversely community feedback strongly preferred servicing visitors in-destination via fixed location human servicing (e.g. a VIC).

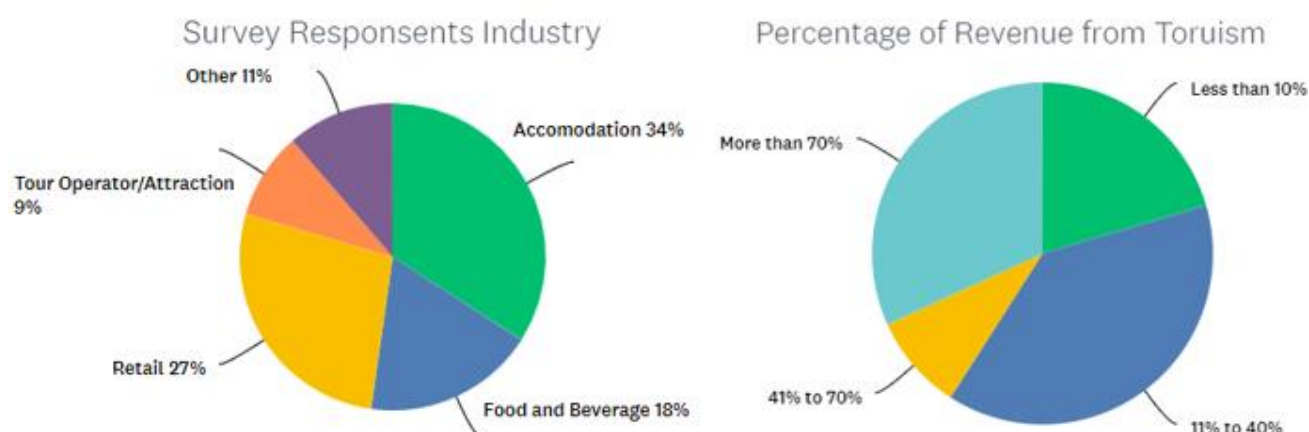


Figure 15 - Industry profile and tourism revenue for local business survey respondents.

Figure 15 demonstrates local business survey respondents represent a cross section of tourism businesses due to covering a range of tourism services and having varying dependency on tourism for revenue generation. It is important to ensure that feedback on this discussion paper also includes a cross section of our tourism business community.

Businesses were asked how they attract visitors to their business. Figure 16 shows local tourism businesses primarily advertise via online mediums include passive, paid and destination websites. When asked which methods provide the highest return, the consensus was passive and paid advertising via the businesses own social media accounts and websites. Passive online advertising includes letting visitors naturally find information through social media and websites. Paid online advertising is when businesses pay to sponsor social media posts and website pages to reach a targeted audience.

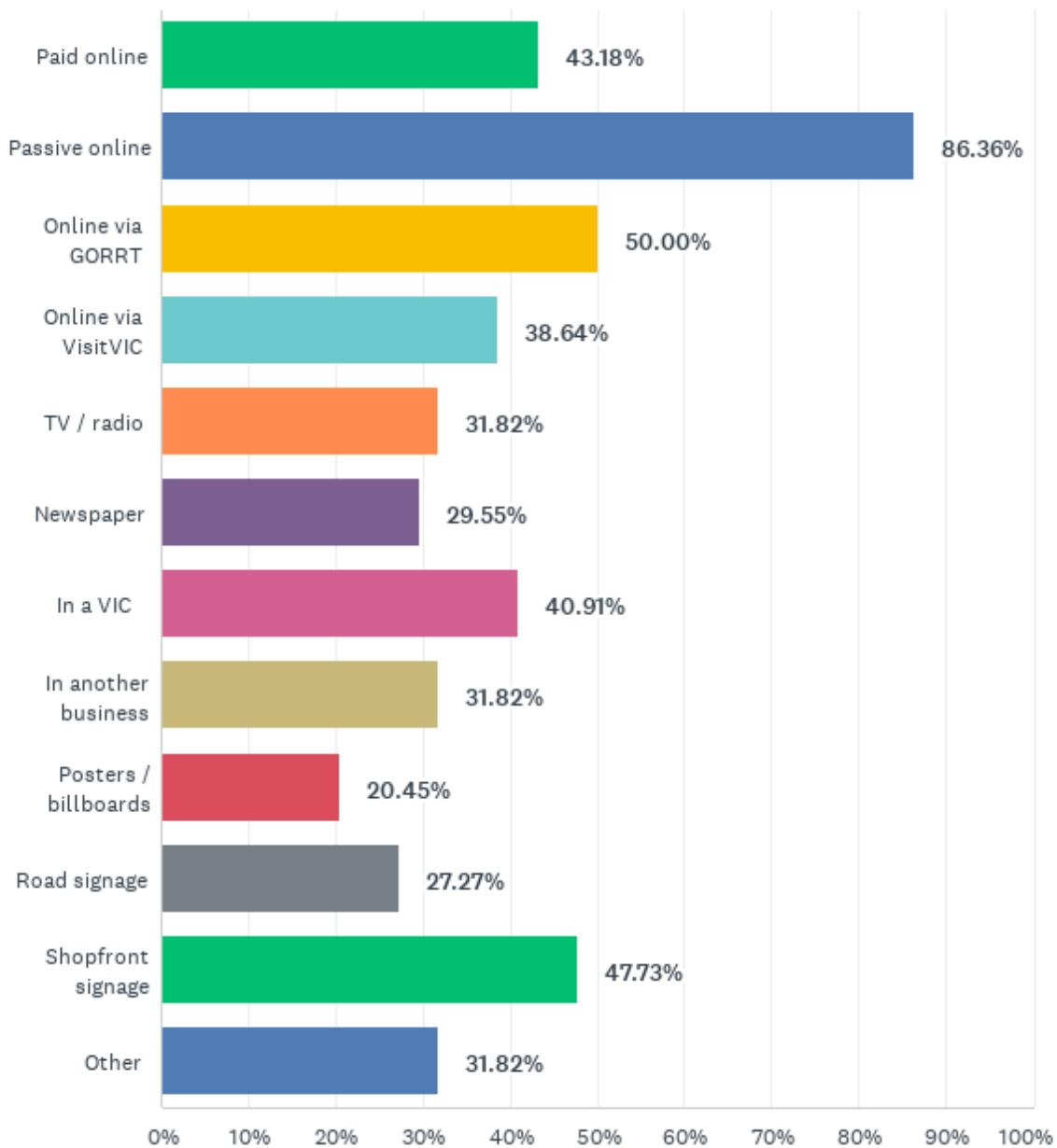


Figure 16 – Survey Response - How local businesses advertise to visitors

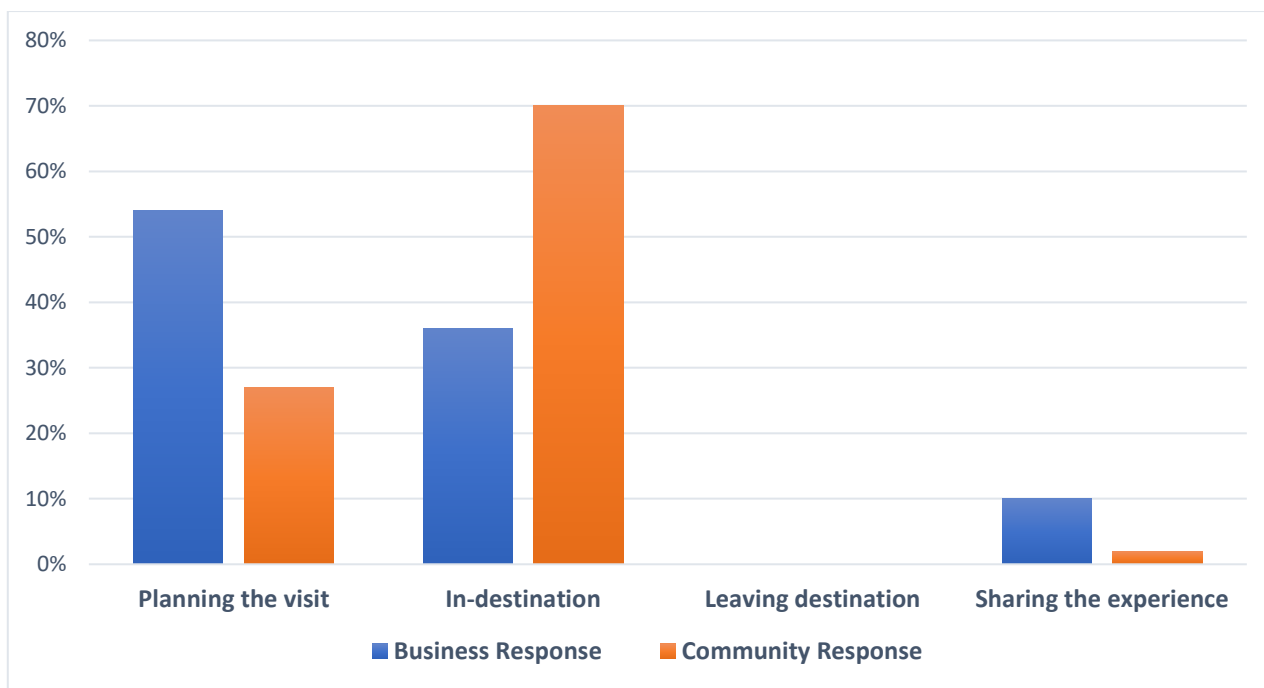


Figure 17 - Survey Response - Servicing visitors at which stage of the visitors trip maximises the benefit to local business

The survey asked local businesses and the community to respond to which option they believed was true for the following statement: *“I believe servicing visitors at this stage of their trip maximises the benefit to our region.”* Figure 17 shows local businesses believe that servicing visitors during the planning stage maximises benefit, whereas community respondents believe it is whilst the visitor is in-destination. The difference may be due to businesses experiencing the direct impact of visitor servicing, whereas our community expectations may be based on previous personal experiences and historical information.

As discussed later in the report, current research shows that influencing visitors whilst they plan their trip has the largest impact on where visitors go, how long they stay and how much they spend. Combined with Figure 17, this demonstrates the need to educate our community on current tourism trends and provide clear rationale for any future decision on Council’s visitor servicing function.

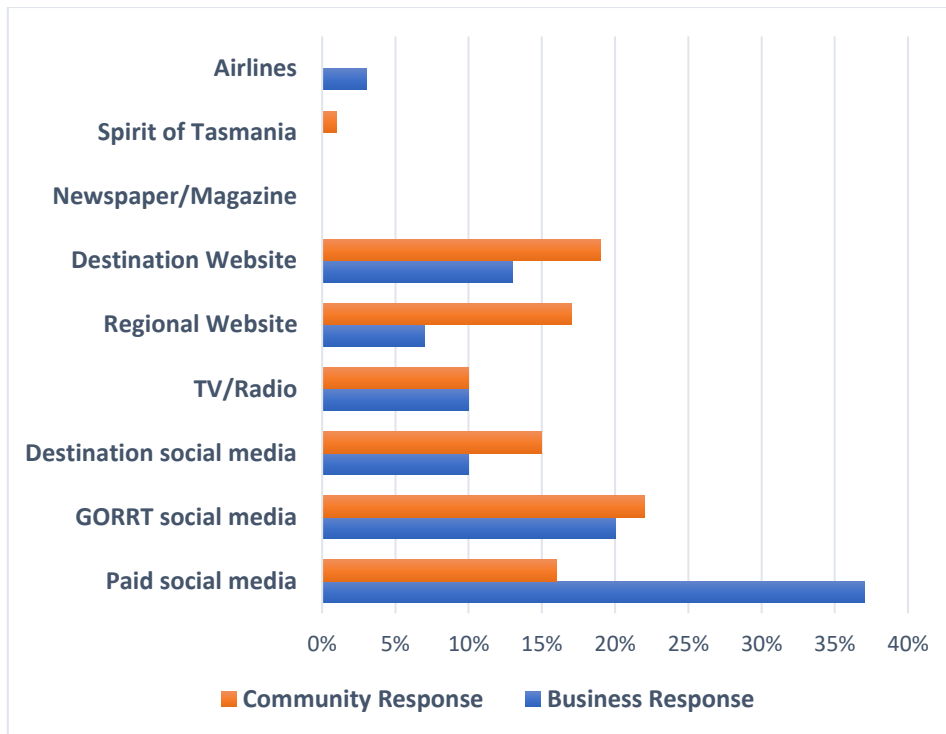


Figure 18 - Survey Response - What pre-destination servicing maximises benefits to local business

The survey sought to understand community and business preferences as to what visitor servicing should be provided whilst visitors are planning their trip to maximise local economic stimulus. Businesses believe paid social media advertising provided the largest benefit whereas the community were spread across social media and website options.

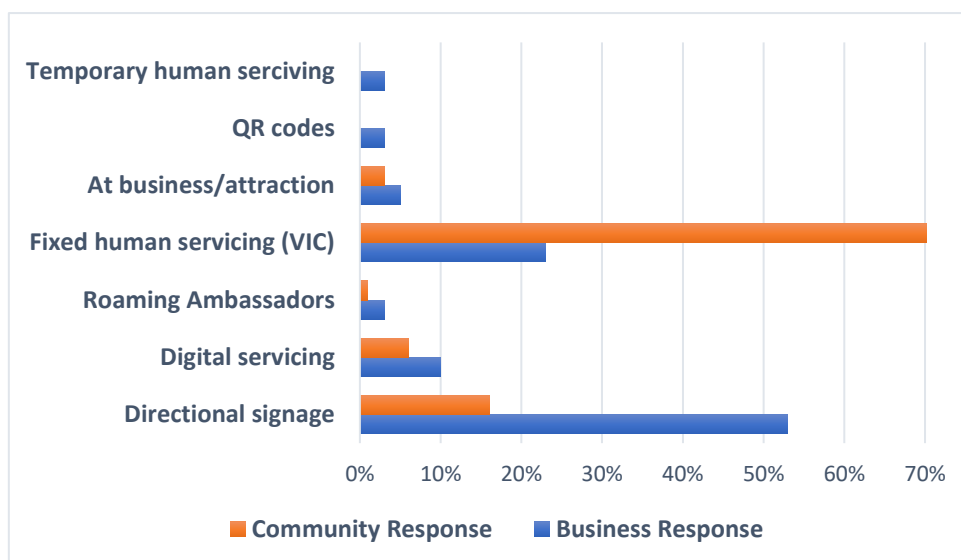


Figure 19 - Survey Response - What in-destination servicing maximised benefits to local business

Survey respondents were asked when visitors are in-destination, what visitor servicing method provides the largest local economic stimulus. Figure 19 shows a majority of businesses ranked directional signage highest whereas community respondents overwhelmingly preference fixed location human servicing (eg: a VIC).

Whilst figures 17, 18 and 19 paint a picture of our local business and community understanding and preferences regarding visitor servicing, supporting comments provide valuable insight into these responses. Respondents were asked to provide a written response regarding their ideas to improve how visitors to our region are serviced/provided with information. Comments from many community respondents focused on the ColacVIC building and service rather than the broader function, whereas business responses tended to have greater focus on the visitor.

The below quotes in blue are a representative sample of the written feedback provided by local businesses.

“Curation of experiences would help support increased length of stay and spend, support cross promotion and presentation of the region as a cohesive destination.”

“Everybody uses online information these days for attractions etc. These need to be informative and easy to access.”

“As a seven day a week business, we are happy to provide information to tourists i.e. the map ‘I am Volcanic Lakes & Plains’ and help with queries.”

“Consistent tourist information centre with opening days and hours to meet peak times.”

“Fixed visitor information centres are things of the past and the Colac centre is a waste of money..... the money could be better spent elsewhere.”

“Paid social media advertising based on geolocation for targeting those who do activities, e.g. mountain bike, and drive them to local websites.”

“If you have spare funds, run a promotional campaign through the regional tourism board. They know what they are doing, and having one strong channel of information is better than two weak ones.”

The below quotes in red are a representative sample of the written feedback provided by community respondents.

“Need a visitor information centre that is open when they visit, staffed by locals with knowledge of the area and the gift shop there was amazing.”

“Opening VIC 7 days a week promoting our history with audio visual displays.”

“Improve the entrances to the town. Highlight lake and gardens.”

“Re-open the VIC and have it open the hours it was before Covid.”

“Having recently travelled extensively around Australia, we found face to face interactions with staff from Visitor Centres was invaluable.”

“More parking for caravans/trailers or signage where parking is available. Caravan wastewater dump site closer to town so holiday makers stop and wander into shops.”

“A kiosk centrally located where visitors can find links to information. The ColacVIC is no longer an effective use of ratepayer money.”

“Make signage to the VIC more visible at the centre and well before the Queen St intersection, at the moment it could be easily missed.”

“Maintain and expand the tourist information centre.”

“Re-open the ColacVIC and make it fulltime. It was a fantastic source of information for all visitors. Every regional centre in Victoria has one and people expect it.”

‘Make use of the very willing and capable volunteers to service the VIC and as roving ambassadors.’

“Online is the future. It’s always good to back that up with a phone number for those who want to speak with someone. In person centres are not as necessary anymore.”

“Advertise the ColacVIC opening hours and encourage more interaction with people who know the region.”

Visitor Trends

Prior to 2000, visitors relied on information sources such as guidebooks, holiday agents and visitor information centres to find out what a destination or region has to offer. Whilst many visitors booked accommodation prior to arriving in-destination, most visitors had not pre-booked tours, where to eat and what activities to do prior to arrival. VICs formed a crucial part of the visitor journey through being a one-stop shop once you arrive in destination to book and plan the remainder of your trip.

Over the last 25 years, technology has changed the world with mainstream adoption of the internet. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that 94% of adult Australians have home internet in 2022. According to *Deloitte Mobile Nations Report 2019*, 9 out of 10 Australians have a smartphone with internet access. This access to the internet means visitors have more information about our destination in their pocket than any destination can provide. Currently when visitors are in-destination, the number one source for finding a place to eat is the google maps app on a smartphone, which includes extensive reviews from other diners.

Technology has changed the world of tourism. It has changed visitor attitudes and disrupted visitor behaviour, and in turn the role of visitor servicing. In 2024, most visitors have booked their entire trip including accommodation, activities and sometimes restaurant bookings prior to entering the destination. Therefore the traditional role of a VIC is now performed online with destination websites replacing brochures, booking platforms including booking.com, Airbnb and GetYourGuide replacing VIC ticket sales and social media/online reviews replacing staff and volunteer recommendations.

Millennials are currently trending to replace Baby Boomers as the high yield visitor demographic as their incomes grow. They are highly connected and digitally capable, tending to take on the planning themselves seeking personalised, authentic experiences that give them deep connection and inspiration. As the instant gratification need of society grows, visitors want information immediately and will find the easiest option available rather than going out their way to find a VIC.

In January 2024 there were 5.04 billion social media users worldwide, or two thirds of the world's population with developed countries including Australia having significantly higher adoption rates. An October 2019 report by Deloitte Access Economics titled *Technology Disruptors in Tourism* found that 75% of domestic travellers reported using social media whilst traveling. This ranged from 48% of people aged 65-74 to 100% of those aged 18-25. Surveys found social media has the largest influence on where visitors went and where they stayed. For destinations, this means social media is a key tool for inspiring a visitor to visit your destination.

The power of social media derives not just from a destination's access to potential visitors via followers and sponsored posts, but the trail of photos, videos and stories left by visitors to inspire their friends and family. The benefit of passive advertising undertaken by our current visitors is

immeasurable, but destinations can increase the volume and effectiveness by creating unique and immediately recognisable points of interest that visitors want to share. This is called creating 'sharable moments' or 'Instagram-able locations.' An example in our region is the GOR Memorial Archway.

Visit Victor

a predict that the visitor economy will be defined by four main trends over the next decade.

1. The rise in Asian migration – Overseas migration, particularly from China and India, has been a key driver for population growth over the past decade. Victoria already has a strong 'visiting friends and relatives' market, which is expected to increase in line with population growth.
2. Increase in working from home – The increase in working from home has allowed people to combine work and travel and stay longer in destination. With the right settings such as accommodation and workspaces with strong digital connectivity, there is an opportunity to attract long-stay visitors and digital nomads.
3. Conscious consumers – Travellers are increasingly looking for authentic brands that align with their values such as sustainability, inclusivity, diversity and action towards treaty. They want to connect with nature, First Peoples culture and eat local produce.
4. Nature-based tourism – Nature based tourism didn't experience any decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research consistently shows the importance of nature-based tourism and we have a significant opportunity to grow our reputation for nature-based tourism.

When planning future visitor servicing it is imperative to understand visitor trends and what information visitors require at each stage of their destination experience as summarised in figure 20. The first stage of the visitor trip lifecycle is the 'dreaming' stage, when visitors are yet to plan their next holiday. To influence visitors short, snappy and immediately recognisable content on social media captures attention. This content can be created by a destination, or current and past visitors with 'sharable moments.'

During the 'planning' stage, visitors seek detailed destination information. A destination can influence how long the visitor visits and how much they spend through engaging and informative content on websites and social media. Whilst booking the trip the visitor seeks validation of the decision through peer reviews.

When in-destination, the visitor seeks connection to the destination. This can be provided through interpretation of what the visitor sees and hears via signage, tours and attractions. During and after the visit, visitors reflect on their trip and often share photos, videos and reviews inspiring the next generation of visitors.



Journey	Needs	How
Dreaming	Inspiration	Social Media Sharable Moments
Planning	Information	Social Media Websites
Booking	Validation	Online Reviews
Experiencing	Connection	Destination Interpretation
Reflection	Gratification	Share Reels Respond to Posts Shareable Moments

Figure 20 - Visitor Trip Lifecycle

What Others Are Doing

Many destinations around the world are reconsidering how they provide information to visitors amid changing visitor behaviour. The majority of visitors now plan and book their entire trip prior to entering a destination, however the largest proportion of most destination’s visitor servicing budget is still focused on ‘in-destination’ services. Destinations are now reconsidering their investment in visitor services to meets visitor demands and stimulate local economic growth. Whilst not all destinations are reviewing how they do visitor servicing, this section examines several leading destinations who have evolved their visitor servicing model and achieved positive results.

Prior to making changes, these destinations all experienced similar trends to Colac with ‘bricks and mortar’ VIC’s reaching a decreasing proportion of visitors each year and visitor behaviour changing. They realise the largest influence you can have on the visitor is before they enter the destination. Table 4 summarises key observations and similarities from these destinations which have influenced positive outcomes.

Decentralisation	Successful destinations no longer expect the visitor to seek out information in-destination and find/stop at a VIC. Instead they bring the information to the visitor via methods including business partnerships, roving ambassadors and digital touchpoints at high visitation nodes.
Local Recommendations	Destinations who include local recommendations, smaller attractions and ‘hidden gems’ into a curated online experience receive the strongest visitor engagement. Visitors still seek the ‘human touch’ even digitally and look for trusted sources of information when planning and booking their trip.
Digital Solutions	Digital solutions can provide increased reach but aren’t necessarily a cheaper option. They require upfront capital investment then ongoing content creation to keep information, itinerates and recommendations engaging and up to date.
Volunteers	Volunteer programs can assist a destination in broadening their reach and provide personalised recommendations to the visitor, however are not a cheaper alternative to other options. Volunteer programs require adequate resourcing to manage, train and resource volunteers.
New VICs	Whilst most destinations are moving away from a ‘bricks and mortar’ VIC, some destinations are investing in new VICs. Successful VICs are co-located with a major attraction so the visitor isn’t required to make an additional stop and they include digital/interactive solutions. Though most visitors now pre-book tours/activities prior to entering a destination, some destinations with an assortment of tour options still sell a viable volume in-destination.

Table 4 - Key observations from comparative analysis



The Cairns and Tropical North VIC opened in 1980 and was closed in 2019 by Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) RTA after 2 years of analysis and consultation. The analysis noted significantly declining visitation and that only 2% of visitors to the area were utilising VIC services. Revenue from bookings and commissions had also dropped due to a trend in visitors booking experiences prior to entering the destination which demonstrating the declining impact of a physical VIC on visitor behaviour.

TTNQ stated “our focus needs to be on getting visitors to our destination rather than assisting them once they have arrived in the region. We believe we can better assist potential visitors through digital platforms rather than investing in bricks and mortar. Travelers already in our region can be serviced through digital platforms and the region’s many tour desks.”

Through the change, TTNQ noted the new delivery model of digital information services requires investment and is not the ‘cheap’ option but does often provide more reach.



Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges VICs were both closed in 2017 despite being entirely run by volunteers. In 2015 the region experienced 6 million visitors, however the VICs serviced only 23,400 visitors at a cost of \$180,000, despite being volunteer run. In addition, the region’s website received 2.6 million visits and social media channels reached 2.3 million visitors over the same period.

After closure of the VICs, reinvestment occurred into digital platforms including integration of a live chat. Digital visitor information kiosks were also introduced after securing a \$250,000 grant from the Victorian Government. The kiosks were installed at the most visited attractions and public spaces and designed as a convenient way for visitors to discover relevant information and encourage them to visit more attractions.





City of Melbourne operates a successful roving ambassador program with ambassadors wearing bright red uniforms available at key tourism hot spots 7 days a week. Ambassadors target the international market at locations such as Federation Square, Swanston Street and the Queen Victoria Market.



Over the last 10 years, City of Melbourne has followed global trends and invested in a decentralised tourism servicing model including the closure of the Melbourne Visitor Centre and opening new Visitor Hubs at key tourist destinations.

In addition to Visitor Hubs, City of Melbourne recently invested in visitor booths at Bourke Street Mall and Fitzroy Gardens.



Moirira Shire has two VICs which are both co-located with other tourism assets including a Forest Heritage and Education Centre. More recently, Moirira invested in a mobile VIC and business partnership program to provide more services at locations where the visitors are.

Visitor Information Points are provided in local businesses that provide brochures and staff that give local tips about the area.

The Mobile VIC travels around the shire and beyond and is placed at key events and tourism attractions to provide services where the visitors are.





Eurobodalla Shire Council undertook a visitor servicing review in 2019 which resulted in the closure of both their VICs in Bateman’s Bay and Narooma after concluding that less than 10% of visitors used them.

Eurobodalla’s new approach was to take information to visitors instead of making visitors travel to information centres, with personal recommendations supported by online information at the forefront. This included a mapping feature on the tourism website that allowed visitors to curate their own itineraries online and a ‘What’s On Eurobodalla’ page to highlight events and activities on offer.



A business partnership program was initiated to bring information to where the visitor is, with a small selection of maps and brochures being available at a network of over 50 local businesses including caravan parks, hotels and attractions identified with the blue ‘i’.



In 2017, VisitScotland announced the closure of 39 of its 65 visitor centres after measuring a ten-year decline in the number of tourists visiting their information centres, amounting to a 58% drop in patronage.

The VICs were closed and replaced with 1,500 ‘information partners’, made up of local businesses such as bed and breakfasts, distilleries, local retailers etc. This program was instrumental in developing a visitor friendly culture through the small towns in Scotland’s north where locals regularly interact with visitors and recommend their favourite local secret spot. VisitScotland also heavily invested in online and digital assets to provide information to the visitor prior to entering the destination during the dreaming and planning stage.

Changes made by VisitScotland led to a 13.9% year on year increase in visitation according to the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, the biggest increase in visitors out of any UK destination.

Future Visitor Servicing Models

Currently in Colac, Council services visitors during the ‘experiencing’ phase of the trip lifecycle via a ‘bricks and mortar’ VIC. It also contributes to the ‘dreaming’ and ‘planning’ stage through its partnership with GORRT who manage social media and website content for the GOR region.

Various visitor servicing models are available to Council that can be delivered in-house or outsourced to third parties including GORRT. Table 5 lists servicing options this paper considers, separated into stages of the visitor trip lifecycle. Whilst table 5 lists potential reach for each option, ‘experiencing’ reach doesn’t create the same stimulus as ‘dreaming’ and ‘planning’ reach as most visitors have booked all destination activities prior to arrival in-destination.

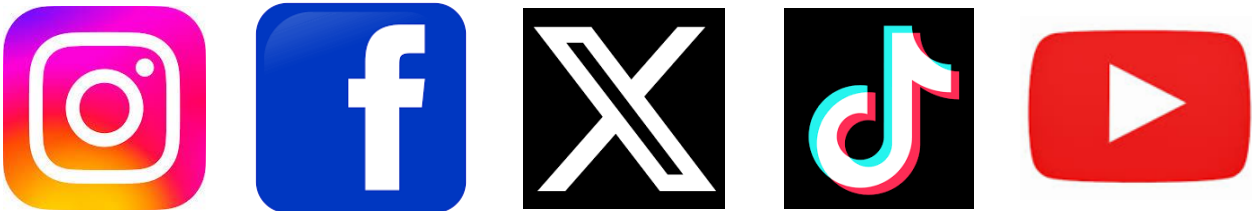
Dreaming		Planning		Booking		Experiencing		Reflecting	
SERVICE OPTIONS			UPFRONT COST	ANNUAL COST	POTENTIAL REACH				
DIRECT SOCIAL MEDIA				\$95,000	350,000 +				
SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION				\$15,000	Limited				
COLAC WEBSITE			\$20,000	\$10,000	Unknown				
COLACVIC				\$122,000	3,600				
BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM			\$25,000	\$25,000	50,000 – 200,000				
DIGITAL KIOSK			\$40,000	\$5,000	15,000				
ROVING AMBASSADOR PROGRAM				\$60,000	25,000				
MOBILE VIC			\$150,000	\$70,000	50,000				
DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE PROGRAM				\$15,000	Unknown				
INTERPRETATIONAL SIGNAGE PROGRAM				NA	NA				
INSTAGRAM-ABLE MOMENTS				Unknown	Unknown				

Table 5 - Service Option Comparison for Future Visitor Service Delivery

Direct Social Media

Direct social media provides the greatest opportunity to inspire visitors to visit your destination and influence how long they visit for. Council has a number of options to engage in direct social media for Colac:

1. Negotiate with GORRT to allocate a larger portion of Council’s financial contribution for sponsored social media content on Colac and surrounds.
2. Increase Council’s contribution to GORRT with a new budget for targeted social media advertising for Colac and surrounds.
3. Council directly engages travel influencers to create content on Colac and surrounds.
4. Council creates its own social media content and sponsors advertising.



Options 1 and 2 benefit from utilising existing resources in the region that are skilled in digital marketing. Additionally as seen in learnings from other destinations, creating a cohesive regional brand curates a consistent visitor experience and encourages the visitor to visit multiple destinations in the region. Segmented messaging from each destination/township leads to competition and can reduce the overall length of the visitor’s trip within the region.

Council managed social media benefits from creating a recognisable brand for Colac and surrounds. A budget would be required to employ a suitably skilled part-time employee to create and manage the content, plus budget for sponsoring posts. As discussed in *‘the role of tourism organisations in visitor servicing,’* servicing during the ‘dreaming’ and ‘planning’ stage is usually undertaken at a regional level. Council could intervene in this model, however the question remains if there is adequate quantity and quality of attractions in Colac to justify this ongoing investment and attain a suitable return.

When undertaking direct social media on a destination level rather than regional level, it is important to make the visitor feel they are getting recommendations straight from locals. This is commonly used in replacement of VIC recommendations through all online mediums. An example could be a competition in collaboration with local media outlets to ascertain ‘locals favourites’, prior to curating digital assets on the outcome of the local feedback.

Search Engine Optimisation

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the process of increasing a website's visibility on search engines such as Google and Bing. SEO can be highly effective in directing traffic to websites and Council could utilise this for the *Visit Otways* and *Visit Apollo Bay* websites. For Colac, this would have limited benefit due to a single page being on the Visit Otways website. If more significant online collateral was created for Colac, SEO or an 'always on' strategy would be a viable future option.

A Dedicated Colac Website

Destination websites primarily influence the visitor during the 'planning' stage of the trip, with some visitors also utilising destination websites whilst in destination. Currently there is limited curated online information for Colac via a page on the Visit Otways website and the opportunity exists to create a destination specific website for Colac. This could be undertaken in one of two ways:

1. Destination website created and managed by GORRT, or
2. Destination website created and managed by Council.

Option 1 would request an increased content package for Colac, similar to Winchelsea's on the GORRT website suite. This option benefits from creating a seamless regional experience for visitors and is more likely to create regional dispersal compared to a stand-alone website for Colac. To maximise the benefit, Council would need to create and curate content for inclusion on the website, ensure social media traffic directs visitors to the landing page, and encourage Colac businesses to sign up to GORRT membership. Numerous businesses in Colac Otway are already GORRT members meaning a GORRT website would provide a seamless integration of existing local business information.

Council could create a standalone destination website for Colac, providing creative licence for destination Colac. In addition to the GORRT website, a standalone website could also share historical information about the township and local recommendations on things to do however detailed historical information is better suited to in-destination interpretational mediums.

As with social media, the limited number of attractions in Colac limits the benefit for a standalone destination website, so option 1 would be the most beneficial if the model of increasing website content for Colac was pursued.

'Bricks and Mortar' VIC

Across the industry, successful existing VICs have common traits that are also considered when locating and designing new VICs. Consideration should be given to the ability of a new or existing VIC in Colac to meet these common traits as failure to do so would lead to continued poor outcomes from Councils investment.

1. Location Reality
Successful VICs are located in high traffic visitor nodes or co-located with an attraction. They proactively go to where the visitor is rather than passively expecting the visitor to find them.
2. Offer a Unique Experience
Visitors come to a destination for an experience so a visitor information centre should be an experience, not somewhere information is gathered on other experiences.
3. Custodians of Regional Stories
Successful VICs play an important role in telling many stories of their destination. VIC's which interpret their destination successfully include Kapunda VIC and Snowy Region VIC.
4. Address a Market Failure
A VIC should understand its role in the visitor economy food chain and identify opportunities where gaps exist to support the experience in their destination. Examples include being a destination from which local tours commence.
5. Digital Servicing is Embraced
A VIC should embrace digital servicing to enhance other physical services. Within the centre, this includes digital advertising and interactive experiences.

Table 6 - Key Considerations for a 'Brick and Mortar' VIC

In Colac it would be unlikely that a VIC would meet all five considerations in table 6. Whilst ColacVIC's location has challenges due to being at the east end of the CBD, currently there are no suitable alternatives due to a lack of major attractions in Colac. With significant investment a VIC in Colac could be developed to create a unique experience, provide regional stories and integrate digital servicing, however these cannot overcome the limitations in Colac.

In Colac the key market failures are limited accommodation options, limited attractions and business opening hours, which cannot be overcome via a VIC. If Council was to continue to provide in-destination visitor servicing it should focus on proactively taking the information to the visitor.

Business Partnership Program

A people-centric provision of information and visitor services continues to be an important way to connect with visitors, reinforce the destination's brand and increase awareness of the region's experiences, accommodation offering and hospitality. In recent years many regions in Australia and international destinations have implemented business partnership programs that seek to provide information where the visitor is and engage local businesses in visitor servicing.

Business partnership programs target attractions, accommodation providers and other local businesses to proactively provide information where the visitors are. In Colac this may include caravan parks, motels and cafes, with attractions such as businesses on the Otway Harvest Trail that are near to Colac also being targeted. At each business a small selection of maps and brochures would be offered that provide information on other attractions in the area. Additionally, participating businesses would have the opportunity to send staff to 1-2 tourism training days per year hosted by Council which could range from 'how to get a visitor to visit again' to 'servicing the international Asian market'. To note - GORRT currently offers workshops and digital tool kits to participating business.

Compared to a 'bricks and mortar' VIC, a business partnership program benefits from going to the visitor rather than expecting the visitor to come to you. It creates multiple in-destination information touchpoints allowing information to reach more visitors. A VIC has extensive information on the wider region and State whereas a business partnership program would provide a small, curated catalogue of maps and brochures that are highly targeted to the local area to maximise economic return. The main drawback is it's difficult to quantify the program's reach compared to a VIC where you can track visitor numbers.

Delivering a business partnership program could initially be via a trial period for Colac and surrounds. If the program was considered successful in the first twelve months, it could then be rolled out across the broader Colac Otway Shire. A key success factor is businesses engaging with visitors digitally and linking their promotion with regional/destination branding and offerings. To note – a previous GORRT regional program including brochure stands received limited uptake outside of major attractions.

An initial budget allocation of \$25,000 would be required to design collateral and signage for participating businesses. An ongoing operation budget of \$25,000 would be required for training activities and to provide and update collateral. It is estimated that managing a business partnership program would require up to 2 days per week of officer time. This would cost approximately \$50,000 per annum (including on-costs), however it could be accommodated by reallocating existing tourism resources to this initiative rather than requiring new resources. Stock levels of brochures and maps across the business network would be managed by staff at Great Ocean Road Visitor Information Centre.

Digital Kiosk

Digital Kiosks installed at key visitation nodes allow visitors to self-serve 24 hours a day and have been trialled by many destinations in Australia and internationally with varying success. Successful digital kiosks are located at high visitation nodes, are immediately recognisable and have regularly updated information.

Kiosks benefit from providing information where the visitor is and allow up to date and seasonal/event relevant information to be displayed.

Whilst many destinations have trialled this infrastructure it has met varying degrees of success. The infrastructure requires a high capital outlay and minimal ongoing maintenance except for resources to update the content.

The ideal location for a digital kiosk in Colac would be next to the new Memorial Square public toilets due to this location experiencing a high number of visitors in Colac. Due to the success risk with this infrastructure, it would not be recommended for Council to invest in the capital infrastructure unless it was to attain a grant for the installation. If grant funding was achieved, a trial installation in Memorial Square with content managed through existing staff resources would inform decisions on future installations at visitor nodes throughout Colac Otway Shire.



Roving Ambassador Program

Destinations such as City of Melbourne run successful roving ambassador programs where staff and volunteers move around the destination and interact with visitors providing recommendations on where to go and what to do. Staff and volunteers are highly recognisable in a branded uniform and available at peak visitation times.

A roving ambassador program in Colac could be delivered with volunteer ambassadors who are coordinated by a member of staff. This requires allocation of resources to manage the volunteer program to perform volunteer training, support, and rostering. To maximise benefits, volunteers would be available at peak visitation times over summer, during large events in Colac and at other destinations, when large numbers of visitors pass through Colac (eg: on long weekends, when other regional events are on such as the Port Fairy Folk Festival etc.).

The drawback of a roving ambassador program in Colac is the limited attractions within walkable distance and limited peak season volunteer availability. Volunteering is declining so having the ability to recruit a sufficient volunteer workforce could be a challenge.

Mobile VIC

A mobile VIC builds on a roving ambassador program though provision of a branded vehicle equipped with tools to assist in sharing information and stories about the region. If a roving ambassador program was successful, the purchase of a mobile VIC could be pursued through available grant programs.



Directional Signage Program

During the local business and community survey, directional signage was the highest rated in-destination visitor servicing method for local businesses. VicRoads provides guidelines for installation of tourism signage including where, what and how often tourism signage can be located. As individual businesses are responsible for signage to their attraction, Colac Otway Shire has inconsistent and sometimes outdated directional signage.

A directional signage program would utilise existing staff resources to audit a defined area's signage each year. The audit would identify outdated signage, areas where signage could be consolidated to remove clutter and gaps in signage to main attractions. Funds would be required for the purchase and installation of some small signs each year, however when opportunities for larger signage that would improve visitor navigation are identified, individual business cases for Council to consider would be required.

This program would be labour intensive so only a small area could be achieved each year with existing tourism resources. If this model is pursued, then resources would be removed from other tourism development tasks e.g. direct business support. A larger project could be funded for an external consultant to audit tourism signage for Colac and surrounds with the aim to create a future signage plan.

Interpretational Signage Program

Visitors to our region are seeking personalised, authentic experiences that give them deep connection and inspiration. To create a deep connection, destinations must provide interpretation to the visitor, so they are informed about what they are seeing and its history. An attraction that does this well in Colac Otway Shire is the Maits Rest Rainforest Walk which provides engaging educational information on sites native fauna and flora, plus interesting stories regarding the site’s human history.

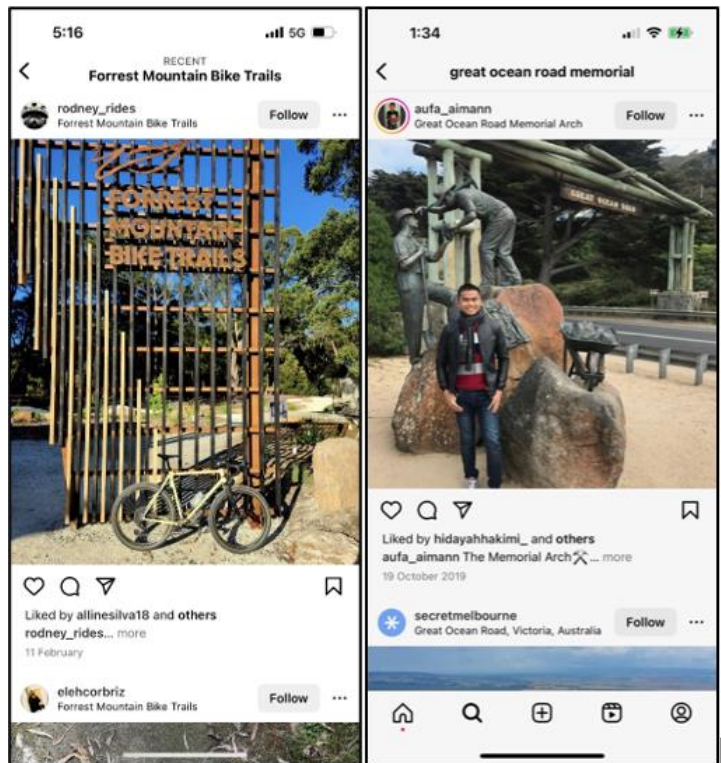
Colac has limited interpretational signage so the opportunity exists to provide improved interpretational signage at key visitor attractions including Lake Colac and Red Rock Lookout. This would improve the visitor experience and increase the likelihood of visitors recommending the destination to friends and family. A blanket budget allocation is not suitable for this program, and instead individual projects would be identified and scoped for Council’s consideration.

Instagram-able Moments

As discussed in this report, visitors are highly connected via digital mediums and seeking to share their experiences whilst in-destination and once they leave. Our destination can maximise this passive advertising effect by creating locations with ‘Instagram-able moments’.

The recent Forrest Mountain Bike Revitalisation Project successfully created an Instagram-able moment by incorporating a branded entrance archway which visiting riders started sharing immediately. This feature increases the likelihood of riders posting about the destination and the branding ensures others can instantly identify the location.

Rather than creating a project to install Instagram-able moments, they should be a key consideration during future tourism developments including redevelopments of existing attractions.



Next Steps

There are numerous visitor servicing options that Council could invest in as identified in this Discussion Paper.

Local business and community feedback on the future provision of visitor services is sought to guide Council's consideration on visitor servicing in Colac. Feedback will be sought via submission, a community drop-in session and a workshop with local businesses. Consultation will seek to explore the following topics:

1. Colac as a tourist destination is limited by the number of attractions, amount and range of visitor accommodation options as well as limited interpretive information about the destination. These factors limit the potential stimulus effect from visitor servicing. Considering this, should Council invest in visitor servicing for Colac?
2. Given the greatest impact on visitor behaviour is when a person is planning their trip, should Council invest more resources into aiming to influence a traveller during the planning stage?
3. Considering the performance of the current visitor service, including the cost of service delivery, visitor trends and what other destinations are doing, what models of visitor servicing would most benefit Colac in the future and why?

